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THE THREE STAGES

OF

UNITARIAN THEOLOGY.

BY

JAMES MARTINEAU.

SECOND EDITION.

LONDON:
37, NORFOLK STREET, STRAND.

1882.

NOTE.—The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, in accordance with its First Rule, gives publicity to works calculated "to promote Unitarian Christianity by the diffusion of Biblical, theological, and literary knowledge, on topics connected with it," but does not hold itself responsible for every statement, opinion, or expression of the writers.

THE THREE STAGES

OF

UNITARIAN THEOLOGY.*

"Doubtless thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy Name is from everlasting."—Isaiah lxiii. 16.

THE true prophetic heart, may we not say, breathes through these words, and gives them a music that can never die away. They are the tones of a spirit tender, yet clear and strong; reverent in memory, open to love, warm with the humanities, yet driven from the sunny front of life, and in its retreat falling back on the sheltering loneliness of God. And do they speak for the Hebrew poet alone? Rather do they pitch the note of a perpetual hymn, caught up and delivered on, age after age, by the noblest voices of history. In the education of our race it is inevitable that the children should outgrow the father's house, and emigrate to new lands of thought; and could the men of old come back among us, and look at us with their patriarchal eyes,

* This discourse was delivered in Unity Church, Islington, May 19, 1869, at the annual meeting of the Association.

who knows but that we might ask their blessing in vain, and Abraham perchance would be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not? To hard and driving natures, content to start the world afresh with each generation, this may seem a mere sentimental grief. But the really progressive minds, that appear to run furthest from the past, are most conscious of their debt to it, most tinctured by its inner life, and most love its venerable names; and for them to be treated as outcasts from the family of the faithful, and find themselves exiles from the communion to which they cling, is a lot more pathetic than stripes and bonds. A divine necessity, however, is laid on them to bear it. They cannot linger in semblances: they cannot tamper with words: they cannot look away from the light, and play it off in tricks of artificial refraction: they cannot breathe the air of half-truth and half-pretence which maintains the sluggish pulses of the world, but must pant aloft into the untainted elements of life: and as this thirst for the pure reality, this sensitiveness to the poison of falsehood, this inability to worship except in absolute simplicity of spirit, must needs take them apart from the level of human sympathy, and often leave the tenderest affections the most alone, what remains but that they fling themselves from the last brink of earthly reliance, and in a passion of infinite trust cast themselves upon the only True, and cry, "Thou, Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; thy Name is everlasting."

No Reformers have been more unconditionally thrown upon this sublime trust than those whose works we celebrate and prolong this day. As if to justify their own protest against the Trinitarian theology, and prove for them

how it darkened human affections, they have been treated as aliens from the sacred commonwealth; and because they would not, at Athanasius's bidding, worship they knew not what, but, abiding by the religion of Christ, would pray only as he prayed, and own no more than his two great commandments, and know no blessing but his beatitudes, they have been thrust outside the walls of the "City of God," and told that the Fathers of the faithful are ignorant of them, and the Christian Israel acknowledges them not. Be it so: these chartered believers may shut up themselves, but cannot enclose our God: without, as well as within, He lives; and, as the gates close behind us, and we go into the open and solitary place, where the cathedral bells are lost and the litanies are heard no more, newer voices of his Spirit may perhaps float to us on the silence, and we may grow into larger apprehension by simply being alone with Him. That there really has been a natural expansion and enrichment of Unitarian theology, favoured by the very banishment into which it has been driven, will appear from a mere glance at the successive stages of its modern history.

Religion, even in its most intellectual forms, can never entirely lose its symbolical character; and the real interest of its doctrines will usually be found far behind the apparent. Had the question respecting the person of Christ concerned merely the composition of an historical individual, human or superhuman, it could never have stirred so intense a passion, and tracked its way through Christendom with such a line of storm. The secret of the strife lies deeper. He stands in it not for himself, but for mankind; and the doubt, whether within that meek and

suffering form the Divine essence is hid, truly means, to those who shrink from it, whether, for us too, any divine life is possible, and the Father of spirits will take up his abode with us. It is not the Jesus of the biographers, but the ideal of our spiritual humanity, the type and head of our race in its heavenly relations, whose seamless robe has been torn by the rude hands of controversy; and were it not that his problem and ours were bound up together, that his divineness was the assumed measure of our communion with God, and that what was asked about him was answered about us, the inquiry must have tired itself out in traversing the ages. But the mind returns with unexhausted wonder to the question, "What are we?" "Where do we stand in the hierarchy of being?" "Do we belong only to Nature beneath us, or can we live in love with God above us?" and, under the disguise of a *Christology*, these *human* issues have ever been upon their trial, and, to those whose ears are open, have mingled with the voices of angry disputants an undertone, not of softening piety alone, but of unsuspected sympathy.

The doctrine of the Trinity is an economy for linking together the Human nature and the Divine; for snatching man, as an exception, from the general physiology of the world, where he would only, like the cattle, be a creature of the universal Maker; for recognizing his Sonship and Divine similitude, as an eternal reality, whether known to himself or unknown, whether reserved in heaven or become historical on earth; and for bringing out his implicit consciousness of this, in the whispered pleadings of a Spirit supreme above his own. God in the Universe, God in History, God in the personal Soul,—these three are sepa-

rately recognized, yet blended into one, in the formula against which we protest; and in dissolving that formula, we may be thought to hazard the balance of these relations, and to insulate ourselves on some hard and narrow unity. Our simpler conception, it is affirmed, is visibly inadequate both to the fulness of the Divine perfection and the depth of human experience, and repels the richer and riper souls of Christendom by the Mahomedan baldness of its piety, and the Stoical evenness of its human ideal. Above all, we are assured, do we fail to provide the needful mediation between heaven and earth. The Christ of the creeds, being *both* God and man, can bring the two natures into harmony. The Christ of the Arians, being *neither God* nor man, is cut off from both, and cannot blend them in accord. The Christ of the Unitarians, being *wholly* man, carries in himself the alienated nature, and lies under the disqualification he is needed to remove. He may be an *example* upon the human level, but cannot, it is said, lift us to the Divine. Without denying either all that is claimed for the Trinitarian scheme or all that is charged on our own, we shall find something to countervail the merits of the former, and to repair the defects of the latter, in the growth of our theology during the last century.

The strength of the Unitarian faith lies in the very first position which it seized, and which I hold to be the impregnable centre of all true religious and moral theory,—that, for all spiritual natures, *Unity* and *Personality* are One. That which distinguishes you from another, and holds you to your identity from day to day, is the permanent Self-consciousness which the stream of varying thoughts touches as it flows, and the continuous Will which issues or

permits the most opposite activities. These are the highest and characteristic attributes of our being; and by its highest attributes must every nature be measured, and in them must its essence be found. Suppose them to change: let a fever obliterate your memory of the past, or establish within you a double and alternate consciousness, unrelated as your dreaming to your day; and we could no more call to account this fluctuating Self than we could punish John for Peter's lie. The moral identity once broken, all other continuity goes for nothing, all other sameness is illusory. What boots it that you are still as tall, as strong, as swift as you were before; that your friends recognize your photograph and your voice; that your pulse has not altered its speed, nor your brain its size? your being has fallen into fragments which these threads are ineffectual to blend. This rule of thought is our only guide when we pass to things Divine; and it compels us to say that, if God be not One *Person*, he is not One at all: whatever else remains, when you have multiplied the *Personal* centres of thought and will, is lower than these, and any Unity it may have is of no interest to us; for whom *nothing Impersonal can ever be Divine.* The Godhead, if by that you mean the Supreme Object of our worship and our trust, subsists not in any spiritual substance within whose compass separate Personalities may have their presence and unfold their celestial drama; but in the living seats of Infinite Mind and perfect holiness: a plurality of these is a plurality of Gods; and if you try to integrate them again by a common relation to some impersonal essence, you do but deify the lower after taking away the unity from the higher.

I know it will be said that the old creeds meant some-

thing less by the word "Person" than it suggests to us; and intended only to mark three distinct parts which the Divine nature plays relatively to the universe and to us. However true the explanation, it leaves the thing explained worse than it was before; for if the Personal attributes, as we understand them, are absent from the members of the triad, where are they to be found? *Who* thinks the divine thoughts? *who* wills the divine acts? whither am I to fly for the Living Mind that answers to my own, Spirit to spirit? If these characteristics are disclaimed for the *personal* elements of the scheme, it is surely vain to seek them in the *non*-personal; and they must simply be without determinate place in it *anywhere*, and float unfixed in the spaces of the Divine Infinitude. And this is the simple truth: the language of the creeds is born of an ancient Pantheistic philosophy, which blurred all the lines between Thinker and Thought, between God and the World, between Spontaneity and Will, and never gained the complete conception of *Personality*, human or divine. This great and prolific idea, approached but not secured by Judaism, is the healthy product of modern times, the chief gain of our speculative intellect, and inspirer of our practical life; and a religion which does not provide for it,—which, instead of borrowing anything from its light and power, only blinks at them and eludes them, and escapes under cover of the Greek ambrosial cloud, half-radiance half-mist, confesses itself unequal to the wants of living humanity. The first essential then of a restored purity of worship was precisely the work to which our predecessors in the last century addressed themselves:—to clear the Personality of God, till it is simple as the unity of the soul: to sweep away the

haze of ancient Pantheism, with the ecclesiastical mythology it holds: to take the eternal Son of God from heaven, and isolate the Father, as the One Infinite Mind, the Sole Self-subsisting Life, the all-pervading Will, at whose disposal creation lies.

The first effect of this absolute loneliness of God inevitably was to exhibit the universe as a stupendous centralised monarchy, administered on one plan, and directed by one power. The provinces of the Kosmos can thus have, as it were, no municipal life; the local agents no real independence: the whole hierarchy of place and rank is but the receptacle and organ of a force given and transmitted: there can be no pause for remonstrance, no idea of resistance: the single impulse from the capital moves on its inexorable lines, and executes its errand at every station as it flies. Priestley's Necessarian type of doctrine was the natural result of his reduction of all causes to One, and his intense absorption in that One. When you plant yourself in thought at the Divine station, and look out thence through the universal fields, and take the clue now of this law, now of that, to conduct you through the maze of phenomena, the whole system, reduced to miniature at that height, must appear as one, with man as a minor organism swept along in its current of force: its scientific program will construct itself within your imagination, filling up its vacancies as the prospect clears; till the whole appears to you as a mighty machine of divine invention, the vehicle of predetermined methods, and the depository of predetermined ends. So long as the Unity of the Divine agency was in question, and was threatened with the partnership of coequal powers, this Religion of

Causation, which indignantly expelled all "fellow-workers" and all withstanders of the Most High, met the wants of the time, and fostered a sublime and comprehensive piety. You pass through an experience at once subduing and exalting, when you part from all realities but the Supreme, and find yourself with Him alone; when the throng of secondary causes ceases to distract and to conflict, and, as it sinks into semblance, drops into the lines of an eternal order; when you try to empty the running waters and the sweeping winds and the teeming earth of any forces of their own, and bid them speak and look for Him alone; when the passions of men rise up against you, and you stand still and answer not, because they subside before your eye into a pulsation of His will; when the very thoughts you seem to think resolve themselves before you into phenomena of His life passing a conscious point of space; when, in short, life becomes to you a sacred dream, and history a soliloquy of God, and the possibility is gone of anything less than the Divine. As if to test at once the sustaining efficacy of this faith, its great apostle in the last century was driven, the victim of ruinous outrage, from the country he had instructed and adorned; and never did they receive more impressive comment than in the lofty patience, the serene trust, the unexhausted benevolence, of the exile of Pennsylvania.

In vindicating the Sovereignty of the universal Father, this scheme subordinates the whole universe alike, and allows nothing to approach nearer to Him than the web to him that weaves it: the threads may be of this colour or of that, in the warp or in the woof; but all are interwoven in the same texture, and hold a homogeneous rela

tion to the Maker. Man, therefore, is not less exclusively a part of nature, than the birds and the plants ; is worked up in the same way into the organism of the world ; and though he may have a larger consciousness, containing within itself more successive links in the chain of production, is equally the theatre of their predetermined order, and powerless to give them an alternative direction. He too, like all else, is as the clay to the potter, to be moulded by another ; and be the pressure on the inside or on the out, he is shaped and does not shape himself. Since he is sensitive, and can be turned hither and thither by the touch of pleasure and of pain, he is *manageable* and may be broken in ; but, since he cannot help going whither the given impulses take him, he is not *responsible*. The treatment of him may be *disciplinary*, but cannot be *moral* ; you may pity him, but cannot blame him ; and he may feel regret, but never compunction. If this is his aspect in the human view, still more must it be in the Divine : how can God, who meant him to be exactly what he is, call him to account, or look on him with less complacency than if he had been different ? And so, the moral sentiments which are superseded on earth disappear from heaven : and He, whose name was once "Righteous," and "Holy," merges all his perfections in "benevolence." Nor does there seem room, upon this scheme, for any *personal* relations between us and God, whether of *similitude* or of *communion*. For that which constitutes Him a *Personal* Being is precisely that Free originating power, of which we have none, and which, centred all in his nature, leaves Him the only *Person* in the universe, and us but a complicated sort of *things*. In the only attribute which gives Him *character*, we can

never be like Him: and we have no independent standing-place from which we may speak with Him, face to face: no private closet where we can enter and shut the door; if we kneel down, it is on his prompting ground: if we sigh, it is his breathing: if we pray, the words move the wrong way, and flow from Him, not to Him: He possesses us behind and before: and turn, and look, and implore and weep as we may, it is still his own drama under masquerade. From this theory, it is plain, the "eternal decrees" have not yet taken their departure; by the touch of Benevolence, they have lost indeed their *cruelty*, but not their *absoluteness;* and something else is needed, ere we meet the presence of Him to whom arose the night-cry of Gethsemane.

The reaction naturally came from the other end of the relation between us and God. As, in the *Religion of Causation*, Man seemed to be crushed into a mere creature, so was it on his behalf that remonstrance broke forth, and, at the bidding of Channing, the *Religion of Conscience* sprang to its feet. However fascinating the precision and simplicity of the Necessarian theory in its advance through the fields of physical and biological law, it meets with vehement resistance in its attempt to annex human nature, and put it under the same code with the tides and trees and reptiles. Our personality, though frightened and dwindled for a moment and hardly believing its own voice, is sure to recover from the most ingenious philosophy, and to re-assert its power over the alternatives before it, and own its obligation to the authority within it; and the second period of our theology is marked by this recovered sense of Moral Freedom. When the tones of the New-

England prophet reached us here, why did they so stir our hearts? They brought a new language; they burst into a forgotten chamber of the soul; they recalled natural faiths which had been explained away, and boldly appealed to feelings which had been struck down; they touched the springs of a sleeping enthusiasm, and carried us forward from the outer temple of devout science to the inner shrine of self-denying Duty. The very inspiration of the new Gospel, in what thought does it lie? *The greatness of human capacity*, not so much for intellectual training, as for voluntary righteousness, for victory over temptation, for resemblance to God; a greatness attested, on the terrible side, by the power to incur *guilt*, to choose ruin, to resist the Supreme Will. The interval between our lowest possible sin and our highest possible holiness is infinite, and can be expressed by no physical contrast of hell and heaven; and that interval measures the range of our power and the solemnity of our trust. Of this vast scale of possibility we have notice given to us in the aspirations and the remorse of conscience; whence we well know that our sins are more than mistakes and our self-conquests more than prudence; that both are our own, and we are shaped into neither; that by the one we sink into mere nature, by the other we rise towards God. Thus regarded, moral distinctions, no longer resolved into mere sentient ones, are reinstated in their independent reality, and the apprehension of them becomes the supreme dignity of all minds. There is one and the same righteousness for the whole hierarchy of spiritual natures, and the free love of it and life in it is the bond of their glorious commonwealth. Here it is that Man is truly "the *image* of God," and not

his moulded *creature* merely. In proportion as he attains goodness, purity, disinterested love, and strength to negative the wrong, does he really reflect the Divine lineaments in little, and enter upon an actual sympathy with the Holiest of all; and the essential perfection of the Parent-Mind repeats itself in the child, and kindles his features with a lustre of the heavens. Under the light of this faith, the history of mankind is no longer a mere branch of the physical development of the world, the last chapter in the natural history of species; but broadly distinguishes itself from these, and appears on a different stage as a drama of real probation; whose great criminals, tyrants and impostors, we are not bound to pity like the sufferers of loathsome disease in an infirmary, but may abhor and denounce as enemies rather than victims of God; and whose heroes and saints we may regard as something more than animated figures handsomely constituted and finely tempered for their work, and visit with our natural praise and reverence, as faithful representatives in time of the Eternal justice and purity. If you gaze down upon the human race from the Causal throne of the universe, they are flung into insignificance and float as gleaming dust upon the air-current. But if from the interior of the human spirit you look up to the heaven of God, you find a possible divineness in man, and an affinity with the Original perfection, which dissipates the illusion of his littleness. Will then this sense of moral freedom, of the reality and greatness of our trust, turn us into Stoics, and set us up in self-gratulation and pride? We are told that so it must be, if we, as free persons, stand face to face with the Personal Unity of the Father who constitutes us his children; and that we can have no humility, unless

there be an eternal Son of God in heaven, to graft that grace upon us as a portion of his own!* If we ask for a reason for this strange dictum, we are only told that it is impossible for a finite personality to be humble out of its own resources and reflections: the feeling must be divinely given. Who then is it that is said to make us partners in this lowly grace? The Eternal and spotless Son of God! Is then humility possible in an Infinite personality, in One who stands only in presence of equal or of lower beings, and in whom failure has never been and progress never can be; yet *not* possible to us in our finite strife and imperfection, who are for ever haunted by the ideal which we do not reach, who see an indefinite hierarchy of excellence above us, and who, in all our short-comings, have day by day to spread our moral record before the Holiest of all? Surely, if there be a position and a mind in this universe, shut up within the tenderest shadows of humility, it is ours; and if it be true, as our critic affirms, that we, Unitarians, feel not these shadows, but lift a self-righteous head, may God give us better knowledge where we stand!

If now we put together the two types of doctrine which I have described, and make them into one, so far as they are compatible, shall we find rest in a complete and adequate theology? Let us say, from the first, that God is Sole Cause in the natural world; and from the second, that He is Sole Cause except ourselves in the moral world, where we are permitted to be "fellow-workers" with Him: is this a finished account of his relation to us? No. All this

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* Tracts for Priests and People, No. XIV., The Incarnation, by Richard H. Hutton, M.A., pp. 27-30.

might be true: He might pervade all nature with his Presence and his Providence: He might invest our spirit with a share of his Free-will: and might then withdraw from our voluntary life, and leave us to work out our moral problem alone, and only in the end return to take account of our fidelity. In this case, each soul would be as a spiritual island planted out in the natural deep of things, beaten by the tides of Law that sweep around, but with autocratic power to turn their destructive force aside, and make them serve its affluence and beauty. We should thus sustain real responsible relations to the heavenly Father, relations which he has planted us out to assume, and which he will recall us to sum up:—but, meanwhile, we shall remain personally apart, and live as sons in a foreign land, executing the sacred trust they have brought from home. Is then our spiritual nature thus rounded off into self-sufficient isolation? and is it across a chasm without a bridge that we look to him, and feel after him in vain to find him? When we too are on the eve of our cross-bearing, and take up the words, "I am not alone, for the Father is with me," is it only of a *physical presence* that we speak, and must we faint and struggle on through the silence of our God? Many a path of life such moral desolation would turn into a dolorous way; nor could there well be a more pathetic lot than to believe in a Father of our spirits and to think him out of reach. But what is to fasten upon us so miserable a dream? Is it the night-mare of Law that sits upon our breast, and turns our cry for Him into a helpless shriek? We have but to open our eyes, and the ghost is gone, and we draw breath in the sweet morning light. Law reigns inflexibly through the natural life, and, if that were

all, would reign inflexibly everywhere. But there is in us that which is above the natural life, and apprehends what lies beyond it; and just as God is not imprisoned in the universe, but transcends it, and in that outlying realm is hindered by no pledge from acting freely out of fresh affections, so have we a range of free ideal life, whence we can look down upon the instincts of nature and up to the infinite Holiness, and which we know is in subjection to nothing inflexible. This is precisely what we mean by *Spirit*,—this liberty to move alternatively out of the thought and love of a reasonable mind: God is a Spirit, in so far as he is not locked up in the invariable order of the world: and there is a spirit in Man, in so far as he is not disposed of by his organism and his dwelling-place, but rises in thought and directs himself in affection to what is above them. Here then it is that there is room for true communion,—that Spirit may meet Spirit,—and that the sacred silence may itself speak the exchange of love. Our moral ideals, the irrepressible sigh after higher perfection, the sense of Divine authority in every vision of the better, the shame at every yielding to the worse, these, we are well aware, are not of our making, or donations of other men; they are *above us;* they are *given to us;* they are what draw us to God, and commence our likeness to him. In this field of spiritual affection that lies around our will, the common essence of man and God, the divine element that spreads its margin into us, has its home, its life, its reciprocal recognition; its bursts of human prayer, its answer of Divine compassion; its deep shadows of contrition, and returning gleams of restoration. The life with God then, of which saintly men in every age have testified,

is no illusion of enthusiasm, but an ascent, through simple surrender, to the higher region of the soul, the very watch-tower whence there is the clearest and the largest view. The bridge is thus complete between the Divine and the human personality; and we crown the religion of *Causation*, and the religion of *Conscience*, by the religion of the *Spirit*. If we, in our poverty of thought, have had to take them up successively, all of them together have the authority of him "in whom all fulness dwells," and can never be wanting in us except as we fail of "the full stature of Christ." We know with what meaning the lily of the field looked up into his eye; and if the robe of beauty on the earth was to him no dead product of the seasonal machine, but woven by the living hand of God, he sanctioned the piety which resolved the creative agencies back into the Creator's. We know with what strong crying and tears he could expostulate with heaven, and wrestle, as it were, will with will, in the hour of temptation and of agony, yet, as a Son, learn obedience through that which he suffered, and end with the calm words, "Not my will, but Thine, be done;" and alike in the strife and in the surrender, we have his witness to the reality of that Moral conflict in which Sin is always possible, and filial self-sacrifice is the only victory. We know how he fed the secret springs of his gentle and holy life, and sought upon the hills and in the night for the loneliest confidences with the Hearer of Prayer, and with mingling confines of personality, felt himself in the Father and the Father in him and his: and we must own in him the supreme witness to the spiritual union of man with God;—a union which, were it constant as in him, might be deemed an Incarnation; but, where transient and intermittent, as

with our lower fidelity, appears rather as a dispensation of the Spirit.

Thus then the Unitarian protest, which perhaps began with too great and monarchical a separation of our world from heaven, comes round at last to a re-union of the human and Divine. And in the cycle which it has run there is a curious recovery, as it were, of the functions of Trinity without its paradoxes, only with the drama transferred from the individuality of Christ to the life of humanity. We have traversed, and at length united, the relations of *creature to the Creator*, of *Son to Father*, of *weak and tempted to the all-quickening Spirit;* and may we not say that thus, without confusing the nature of God, we have enriched and ennobled our religious comprehension of Man, and provided for a more balanced justice to the claims of Nature, of Conscience, and of the Soul, and a blending consecration for them all? If an expanding faith brings us, as we think, an ampler peace, let it stir us also to a deeper fidelity, and if those who know us not still drive us from the sacred enclosure and treat us as wanderers from the Christendom we love, all the more let us fling ourselves into the embrace of the Only True, and still say, "Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not: Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer: thy name is from everlasting."

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THE

CHRISTIANITY OF CHRIST.

BY

WILLIAM GASKELL, M.A.

37, NORFOLK STREET, STRAND, LONDON.

1881.

The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, in accordance with its First Rule, gives publicity to works calculated "to promote Unitarian Christianity by the diffusion of Biblical, theological, and literary knowledge on topics connected with it," but does not hold itself responsible for every statement, opinion, or expression of the writers.

THE CHRISTIANITY OF CHRIST

By WILLIAM GASKELL, M.A. *

Among many noteworthy departures from old beliefs which are manifestly taking place, is the change in the once almost universally received doctrine of the plenary inspiration of the Bible. No moderately instructed theologian would now, I suppose, think of maintaining that it is an infallible Book, whose authors were secured from all error and guided into all truth—a theory which has done so much to obscure its real beauty, and bring it with many into something very like contempt. Relieved from this, it will no longer be subject to that deceitful handling which it has to endure, in order to force its various teachings into a show of agreement with each other and with fact, and men will be brought to find in it an inspiration higher and better than any of a mere verbal kind.—Speaking generally, too, there is evident among the leaders of orthodox thought a growing dissatisfaction with the forms in which the consequences of Adam's sin and the effects of Christ's death have usually been presented, and a desire to bring them somewhat more into accordance with the demands of reason and conscience. And not a few eminent ministers of various churches are shrinking, as well they may, from what one of them calls "the hateful and horrible" doctrine of endless punishment; some finding a refuge from it in the theory that the finally impenitent will be blotted out of existence; others resting in the larger faith which we have always held, and which the Laureate shares—

> "That nothing walks with aimless feet,
> That not one life shall be destroyed,
> Or cast as rubbish to the void,
> When God has made the pile complete."

In these and other respects, the harsher features of the old established theology are gradually being softened and toned down. In fact, very much of what now passes for Orthodoxy, only a generation ago would have been denounced as little better than Heresy.

But while the Christianity of the creeds seems losing its hold

* From the Sermon preached at the Fiftieth Annual Meeting of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association, May 19th, 1875.

on the reverence of men, they are coming, I believe, to ac
more truly the Christianity of Christ—the spirit which sh
forth in his life and made it divine; and what we are
specially called to do is to set as clearly and forcibly before
as we can, that what mainly moves us in our opposition to
accepted tenets of the Churches which we reject, is our deep
viction that they are out of harmony with that spirit, and as f.
this is the case must be anti-Christian in their tendency.
me give an illustration or two of what I mean.

First, we have to face the Church which calls itself Cath
but which really is such merely in name. We may admit
beauty and impressiveness of some of its forms of worship,
allow the services which it has rendered to civilization
darker days gone by, and acknowledge the grandeur of its id
of a holy union among all people of every nation, clime,
tongue; but when it bids us renounce our mental and mo
freedom, and place our consciences under the control of
earthly ruler—call himself Pope, or Cardinal, or what he
—then it goes in direct opposition to the spirit of the "
Master," and would, I am persuaded, were he to return to th
scenes, draw forth his unsparing rebuke. If anything ab
him is clear, surely it is that what he had supremely at he
was to emancipate men from every spiritual yoke; from
domination of priestly rule, from the thraldom of ceremo
observances, from the tyranny of appetite and passion, a
bondage to any moral evil. What truth did he ever enfo
by any other authority than its own evidence and effec
What check did he ever put upon honest inquiry? W
censure did he ever pass on sincere conviction? Did he
appeal to reason, to testimony, and to facts? His, indeed, f
nishes a unique and solitary instance of a religion based
intellectual liberty. Of the Papal system, assuredly, noth
like this could be said. It is a spiritual despotism of the wo
kind, which every true freeman of Christ should set him
resolutely to resist. Our position for doing so has an adv
tage which Protestants in general do not possess. The cha
of intolerance which Romanists fling back upon them w
such damaging effect, flies harmless past us. It cannot be s
of us, as it mostly may of them, that we proclaim the right
private judgment, and then interfere with its exercise—gi
as it were, with one hand, and take back with the other. A

one of the calls, therefore, which seem specially made upon us by the position in which Providence has placed us is, to improve the opportunities which are afforded us for shewing how inconsistent with the spirit of Christ are the demands that are made in the name of him who claims to be his Vicar, and faithfully to do our part in breaking up the huge spiritual tyranny of which he is the head.

So, in like manner, there is need for us to make a determined stand a gainst the Sacerdotalism which is gaining ground in the English Church, and which, no doubt with good intentions, is, I am convinced, doing serious injury to true religion, by the unreal importance which it attaches to particular rites, and forms, and ceremonies. A factitious holiness is set up, imperatively requiring a priestly class for its service, and it is made to appear as if God's grace could only be obtained by their means, and received through sacramental channels. How any one who has ever read the life of Jesus, "the first-born among many brethren," can entertain such an idea, is to me a mystery. I see no trace of his having treated with any special reverence the Priests and Levites of his day; and one of the great objects which he sought plainly, was to bring all men alike into direct and living communion with his Father and their Father. And our loyalty to him demands that we should expose, clearly and boldly, the unchristian nature of the belief that there is anything like an exclusive priesthood, of any particular class, in "holy orders," ordained to interpose between the soul and God, and distinctly teach that in the worship of Him all which is required to make it acceptable worship is, that it be "in spirit and in truth."

Again, applying the same test, I cannot but think that if our orthodox brethren could be brought to subordinate their theology to the spirit and conduct of him from whom they profess to derive it, they would feel compelled to acknowledge how untenable some of their present beliefs really are. For instance, if the Son of Man were to appear amongst them, and they were to see him kneeling in prayer, and hear him declaring, "My father is greater than I," and attributing to Him all his powers and mighty works, and saying that, "without Him he could do nothing," I can hardly imagine that they would worship him as God, in all respects equal with his Father. The inference is clear.

So, too, take the doctrine, commonly taught in his name,

respecting what is known as "the Fall." Can any one for a moment conceive of the Saviour, for an act of disobedience to his will, dooming even a single individual to endless sin and misery? How is it to be believed, then, of the Father whom he came to represent, and with whom he declared himself "one," that for the offence of two He could doom the whole race to such a fate? When do we ever find him vilifying human nature as that which, the English Church tells us, "in every person born into this world deserveth God's wrath and damnation"? By his mode of addressing men, did he not shew his confidence in it, his assurance that it would respond to his appeals, and was able to judge rightly and feel rightly, and sympathize fully with the divine lessons which he taught? And did he not give as direct a refutation to the idea of inborn sinfulness as he could, when, taking up little children in his arms and blessing them, he said, "Of such is the kingdom of heaven"? How, with his example and a declaration like this before them, those who profess to look up to him as their great religious guide can persist in trying to torture two or three doubtful texts into an opposite meaning, and dare with their darkness to confront his light, I am utterly at a loss to discover.

When the idea just referred to is taken away, the necessity for the popular doctrine of the Atonement, almost as a matter of course, goes with it. Yet, as I need hardly say, it is one to which the utmost importance is generally attached. For instance, in a sermon recently delivered at St. Paul's, Canon Liddon told his hearers, "We ought never to pass by the Cross without recognizing its full meaning for us—the full and perfect satisfaction which he (Jesus), as God and man made upon it." And Mr. Dale, the Congregational Union Lecturer of the present year, taking "The Atonement" for his subject, went almost on the lines of the old theology—maintaining that the death on Calvary was "a propitiation for the sins of the world," that this is the only explanation of "the awful greatness of the victim," and that "God is ready to confer on us remission of sins for Christ's sake." And the corollary mostly drawn from these premises is, that pardon for sin is only to be obtained through faith in his "atoning merits." This is not the occasion to shew how this doctrine goes against some of the deepest moral sentiments of our being, but surely it must be seen how completely at variance it is with what we know of the spirit of

him who came to seek and save that which was lost. Who can believe that he would have hesitated to receive any humble penitent that came to him seeking forgiveness, until some one stepped in and offered to make full satisfaction for the offence that had been committed? Would he not have pitied, and said, "Go, and sin no more"? By the parable of the Prodigal Son did he not plainly shew his own belief that God needs not to be reconciled to His erring children, that He yearns with affection for them while they are yet afar off, and is glad when they return to welcome them back? And if the orthodox theory were true, should not his prayer on the cross have been, not "Forgive them, for they know not what they do," but "Forgive them for the sufferings which I am now bearing in their stead"? And if, as is still often preached, there is no hope whatever for the myriads who go hence without having been brought to a faith in his vicarious sacrifice, must he not be very different in spirit now from what he was while on earth, that he does not become incarnate once more, and seek to rescue them from perdition by bringing them to a knowledge of the great all-saving secret?

The natural effect of the doctrine just spoken of is to draw off attention from the prime essentials of religion—doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God—to fix it on right believing. This has been strikingly made manifest in the Revivalism which has received such encouragement from numbers of Evangelical clergymen and ministers throughout the land. Far be it from me to speak slightingly of any well-meant effort to break up the dense masses of heathenism and irreligion which surround us; but I cannot help feeling that in the movement to which I refer entirely false views are given of what salvation really means, and how it is to be obtained. Trust in Jesus is made to act like a charm. Only come to him, and he will remove your sins, take them upon himself, become your substitute, and you are safe. All that is needed to secure "the prize of your high calling of God in him," is one great act of faith. This might well be termed "salvation made easy." Without fighting, you gain the victory; without running, win the race. Such immediate success is, I hold, altogether inconsistent with the laws of our being. I do not deny that there may be cases in which, under the influence of some powerful feeling or startling event, what is known as "instantaneous conversion" may be produced —just as, now and then, a flash of lightning changes the

polarity of the needle—but such cases, I am convinced, are rare, and come to little unless the impulse given to the better energies of the soul is followed up by resolute, persevering struggles after spiritual excellence. Such a magical transformation as is supposed, by which the sinner is turned at once into the saint, and made fit for heaven, appears to me only somewhat less unreasonable than the regeneration which, according to Anglicanism, is effected by the utterance of a few words by a priest, and the sprinkling of a few drops of water from his fingertips on an infant's brow. Views like these I cannot in any way bring into accordance with the spirit of him who made it his "meat and drink to do the will of Him that sent him, and to finish His work;" who, after recounting various acts of piety and manifestations of moral goodness, without the slightest hint of the necessity to hold any particular form of faith, declared, "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house upon a rock;" and who, instead of that which would often seem with orthodox professors to be the question of greatest moment, "What *believe* ye more than others?" made it, "What *do* ye more than others?"

To take another illustration of the way in which the teachings of the popular Churches may be tried by the spirit of Christ.—Can any one for a moment suppose that he, so tender and compassionate, could have condemned an erring creature, however badly he might have sinned, to pain and anguish through the whole of his mortal life, or even for a few of its threescore years and ten? Yet we are still asked to believe, and treated as heretics if we do not, that He whom he looked up to as his Father, and would have us look up to as our Father too—"kind even to the unthankful and the evil"—keeps millions on millions of souls alive for ever in order that He may torment them for ever! Christ's express object was to bring us to love God as he himself did, with mind and heart and soul; but this and other representations which are given of Him make such love a thing impossible, and strike me, I must say, as little short of blasphemy.

It is sometimes said for our encouragement—and said, no doubt, with much truth—that there are many in other Churches who hold views little, if at all, different from those which we, as Liberal Christians, hold. For my part, I had rather this could not be said. I know not what your feeling may be, but

to me, I confess, there is something almost pitiful in the pleas which are put forward, and the devices which are resorted to —the way in which creeds are tortured, and words are made to yield non-natural senses—by men who should set a high example, to lessen the sanctity of truth, and mystify the requirements of common honesty. For such liberalism as theirs I have not a particle of respect. It is not for me to judge them; but I may say, I wonder how they reconcile their conduct with the spirit of him who came to bear witness to the truth, and bore it through the midst of such opposition and trial, and for it went to the death of the cross.

If you have at all gone along with me in these thoughts, you will acknowledge what reason there is for us to speak out, bravely and boldly, the truths which we believe to be in harmony with his spirit; but let me just touch on one or two motives which urge us to do so.

Rightly, it seems to me, does Mr. Gladstone look upon the assumptions of the Church of Rome—and with reason might he do the same in regard to Churches nearer home—as hindrances to that catholicity among his disciples for which the Saviour prayed. It is an idle dream to hope that they can ever all be united in anything worth calling Christian fellowship, so long as the principle which lies at the foundation of Orthodoxy prevails —the principle that saving faith is synonymous with a correct creed. This is the original sin which runs in its blood, and makes it almost of necessity bigotted, exclusive, and uncharitable. Constituted so differently as men are, and subject to such different training, they cannot all agree in opinion, but they may all agree in reverencing and loving Christ, as the divinest of our race. If they could only be brought to see how much better this agreement is than that, there would then be no ground for the bitterness of sectarianism left; fellow disciples would seek truth together as alike fallible creatures, and respect the honest convictions of every sincere soul, differ widely as they might from their own, and be able to say, as they cannot at present with real feeling say, "Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity." It seems like mocking him to imagine that, if he were now going through the Churches that call themselves his, he would go with one of their various creeds in his hand—say the Athanasian, for instance—and declare, "Unless you think thus, without doubt you will perish everlastingly."

Yet, in reality, this is something very like what they represent him as doing. One of the duties, then, of the position which, as Liberal Christians, we occupy, is to try to make our orthodox brethren acknowledge that, not unity of opinion in regard to certain theological questions, but unity of spirit—unity in reverence and love for our common Master—unity in working for the great objects for which he worked—is what is supremely to be desired, and that only by being brought into such unity can there ever be "one fold and one shepherd."

Although by a happy inconsistency many contrive, no doubt, to reconcile some of the doctrines which I have glanced at with the necessity for holy living, it is not less certain that many also are led by them sadly to undervalue the importance of such living. One of the favourite hymns of the Revivalists even goes the length of saying,

> "Till to Jesus' work you cling
> By a simple faith,
> 'Doing' is a deadly thing,
> 'Doing' ends in death."

Though other causes are at work in the same direction, not a little of the scepticism and unbelief now so rife, and which orthodox bishops and teachers so loudly bewail, we have good reason to know, is traceable to the forms in which Christianity has generally been presented. The wonder to me often is how it has been able to bear up at all under the heavy load of theological superstitions, hard dogmatism, and irrational fancies which have been heaped upon it; and the way in which it has done this affords no small proof of its inherent vitality and power. But the doctrines which have been preached as the absolute truth in its name are becoming divorced from the higher intelligence of the age, and all things tend to show that if it is to retain its hold on men's minds and hearts, it must be proclaimed in a much freer and larger, a much more reasonable and generous spirit, than it has been. For doing this we have, I conceive, not a few advantages.

In what is known as the "religious world," an opposition has very generally been set up between reason and revelation which is most damaging to the latter, as though it would not bear examination; and from the way in which "rationalism" is often spoken of, we might verily be led to think that "irrationalism" was to be preferred. Of the fear which orthodoxy thus displays of what it terms a "carnal power," our free faith knows nothing.

It asks men only to use it diligently and conscientiously, seeking to learn God's truth and what He requires of them, and never think so unjustly of Him who guides their ways as to believe that He will then suffer it to lead them into damnable error. We have no articles with which to shackle their souls and put them "in circumscription and confine." We are fully persuaded that incalculable wrong has been done to the true interests of Christianity by popes and priests and councils, who have striven to convert its living, growing germs of divine truth into the hard and lifeless petrifactions of creeds; and that well indeed would it have been for the world if the religion of Christ had not been pressed and coerced and cast into the narrow mould of orthodox decrees, and handed down in this rigid shape as the genuine gift of our Father in heaven. This, we hold, is not the Christianity of Christ, and with such perversions we have nothing to do but to expose them. To us it presents, not a set of stiff, unbending forms; not fixed and unrelaxing institutions; not a yoke of ceremonies and opinions intolerable to be borne; but glad tidings of great joy, a message of peace and reconciliation, sweet accents of hope, full of glory and immortality, and an assurance that "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" on which we are to stand fast for ever. Such is the kind of Gospel which we have to preach —one made up of a few great principles, requiring no metaphysical subtlety for their explanation—one not opposed to, but in harmony with, all the purer instincts and higher affections of our nature—one fitted to meet the deepest wants and holiest aspirations of the soul, and give "peace and joy in believing"—and one which a large and increasing number in almost every denomination are, I am convinced, waiting for and ready to receive.

So, too, I might show the confidence which our free faith inspires as regards the advances of Science which Orthodoxy has reason to tremble at. Evidently the former is making terrible inroads on some of the most cherished tenets of the latter, and causing it no little fear. We, on the contrary, have no apprehension that it will ever render our Christianity obsolete; for its great principles are planted in our nature, entwined with our affections, and as such are indestructible. Our persuasion is, that true religion never says a thing which true science contradicts. We can feel assured that each new disclosure which it makes will but serve to reveal more fully the Creator's glory; that the

more we come to know of His working the more clearly shall we see how narrow has it is, and the more profoundly be led to adore.

I need not enlarge on the various encouragements we have, in the present interest which is everywhere manifested in religious subjects, and the general unsettled state of religious opinion, to try more know what the principles of our faith, still so little understood, really are. But such an opportunity as is now afforded us as we have never had before, and if we turn it to good account, we can hardly doubt that great and blessed will be the result. Let us, then, give ourselves to the work which God sets us to do in a spirit more commensurate with its dignity and importance than we have ever yet done, and see that it is no wise sullied through any fault or negligence of ours. We believe that the views which we hold are in some respects, more in accordance with the mind of the Master than those which are held by the members of most other Churches; we think that in these times God has given to us " the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind;" we maintain that the system of faith which we adopt is a rational, unfolding life, and practical system, one that is amenable to freedom, favourable to progress, assimilable to improvement of every kind — we ought, then, to be distinguished among Christians by the greater purity and holiness of our lives, and by our greater zeal and earnestness in the promotion of whatever makes for human good. Brethren, let this be our distinction. There is a clear call upon us, and ample room for us to put forth our higher efforts and to work with far more efficient heads we have done in the past. The fields around us lay white unto harvest. Let us enter in, and labour, as Christ's servants should, simply, heartily and diligently, for God's sake, and we cannot labour in vain. At times, perhaps, the progress of the cause which we are anxious to serve may seem slow, and our labor we desire; we are not like children sowing their seeds in the ground, to weep, and complain, and to be concerned because the seed does not come up to-morrow. Let us do the best we can, never doubting that in God's good time it will be sure to fall to His glory and the benefit of man; and so long as God spares us let it be our determination to labour faithfully to advance His blessed kingdom upon earth — the kingdom of truth, and peace, and righteousness, and love.

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THE VOCATION

OF

UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

British and Foreign Unitarian Association,

AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING IN ESSEX-STREET CHAPEL, STRAND,
JUNE 7, 1876.

BY

THOMAS ELFORD POYNTING,

OF MONTON.

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THE VOCATION OF UNITARIAN CHRISTIANS

Ephesians iv. 1:

"I beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."

We meet together to-day with one common purpose in our hearts—that of promoting religion—promoting it in the form in which it commends itself to us in greatest loveliness and power, that of Unitarian Christianity. By naming the one common purpose we show that we recognise in Unitarian Christianity something which is common to us all. We are not united only as men who agree to differ, but much more as men who can afford to differ because they feel how largely they agree. And even if we are not we alone who are here to-day that have much in common; though we are not authorised to make the Assembly meeting here representative of our whole religious community, we cannot forget that there is that community, and that what is common to us is common to a large body of Unitarian Christians with us, and that thoughts which may quicken our hearts to-day may awaken a response much through our whole Unitarian people.

And let it not be taken as a narrowness of spirit that I now confine my views within the field of Unitarian Christianity. We have all of us sympathies extending

far beyond the limits of that field, acknowledging every man that "feareth God and worketh righteousness" as a fellow-member in the same great universal Church; but to-day we meet as Unitarian Christians, and so it is to us as Unitarian Christians that I am called to speak. My work, I take it, is if possible to reach and interpret our common religious consciousness; for in that common consciousness must be revealed our common vocation; what its deepest convictions, reverences, aspirations, call us to do; what the extent of our sympathy with each other will enable us to co-operate in doing.

Of course, in this endeavour to reach and interpret our common religious consciousness, I can only fall back upon myself, and try to find and express what I feel to be the deepest things in which I have experienced communion with brother Unitarian Christians. I feel assured, then, that though I find myself differing from them, now upon this, and now upon that point of theological belief, there is also a large common element of belief and life in which I and they are heartily one. I feel that the very word, "body," by which we usually name our religious community, is suggestive of its organic unity. We *are* a body consisting of members greatly differing indeed from one another, as hand differs from foot, as eye from ear, and yet animated by one common life, fed by one common blood; and so our *common* Unitarian Christianity is not something crystallized into one hard, fixed form for evermore. It is the Life of this body, the life of a growing organism, ever changing by orderly development; and therefore to attempt to define it for ever by what it is or has been at any particular stage of its growth, is like attempting to define the life of the man for all his days by what it has been at any particular epoch—to make, for example,

the mental life of the child, with its childish thoughts and feelings, the measure for the mental life of youth, or that of the youth the measure for the man. God's truth is indeed one, but our knowledge of it "grows from more to more." We shall understand the organic unity and development of our body by looking at the history of one of its members. Take, then, a congregation, now Unitarian, descended in unbroken succession from Puritan forefathers. We look back and see that congregation at its secession and settlement Calvinistic after the the type of Baxter. By and by, perhaps, we find it passing through something like an Arminian phase, more after the type of Doddridge. Then we find the influence of men like Clarke and Whiston inducing a change to Arianism. Dr. Priestley and his school lead the congregation by and by to Unitarianism of one school; and then, later on, men like Channing, John James Tayler, and Martineau, aid in a gradual development towards Unitarianism of another school. Attempts have been made from time to time through all this evolution to fix and crystallize the life in the type of one particular epoch; but the strength of the life itself, following its own law of development, has always made the effort vain. And so it happens that though we to-day have doctrines, we have no true dogmas; i.e. no doctrines decreed—δεδογμένα—by any authority to bind us down, to arrest or impede our growth. We have not had, because we would not have, any General Council to mark off a catholic orthodox faith—to be held—from heterodox opinions, to be rejected. We have permitted no Westminster Assembly and no Convocation with Parliament to draw up for us a Westminster Confession or Thirty-nine Articles to be believed for evermore. I could not then, if I would, this evening, estimate the common element in our Unitarian Christianity by

pointing to any authoritative standard, and so telling you what it is by defining what it ought to be: for no such standard exists. Unitarian Christianity is a *living* thing, and if we would know it, we must study it in its life. Nor will it do to appeal to etymology to discover what the words "Unitarian Christianity" *must* mean. Etymology may teach us what words once meant, what according to their derivation they ought to mean; but to find what they do mean, you must learn by observation what are the thoughts which they actually cover in the minds of those who use them in the "living present." The words Unitarian Christianity have undoubtedly extended their meaning beyond the old etymological sense of "Unitarian," and beyond what Christendom at large considers the true sense of "Christianity," and now signify in common parlance among us the whole religious life and opinions of the people who call themselves Unitarian Christians, and are nearly synonymous with "Liberal Christianity." I appeal then to no external authority. I appeal simply to your own consciousness, and ask, what do you feel to be common to yourselves and fellow-Unitarians in the Unitarian Christianity which you hold and desire to promote?

At the same time I gratefully own that our *living* Unitarian Christianity has its roots in the past, with which it must preserve an organic connection to be healthy and true. There is a religious consciousness broader than ours running through the life of our Unitarian forefathers, through the long life of Christendom, through the life recorded in the Scriptures, through the life of humanity; and we must compare what is common in our consciousness with what is common in that larger consciousness. Returning to ourselves, there are several elements which are, I think, unquestionably common to us. There is, first,

our religious life itself, considered in its simplest form; second, our claim to mental freedom; third, our reverence for Jesus Christ; fourth, our endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology; fifth, our Antitrinitarianism or Unitarianism proper.

Now I notice these separately for the convenience of treatment, though I know of course that they do not exist as separate elements. They run into one another, and are blended in our minds into one living whole. First of all, there can be no question that among sincere Unitarian Christians there is a universal *consensus* in holding, or aspiring to hold, religion, in its simple essence of a life of love for goodness, opening into love for God and love for man. I say love for goodness, because it seems to me there is often at least a rudimentary stage of religion, in which, like a precious flower in the bud, it has not yet developed into the expanded blossom of love to God and love to man. There is a stage when the mind has only awakened to moral consciousness, has become sensible of a higher and lower within itself, and of an obligation to surrender itself to the higher and suppress the lower, whilst it sees, perhaps, the manifestation of this self-surrender to the higher in the character of the dear mother, or the Christ, or other venerated persons. Its religion is then simply a vague love of goodness within and without, as yet not clearly discerning the elements of which full goodness is composed. By and by, as knowledge enlarges, these are disclosed, and the love of goodness opens into the love for the perfect goodness in God, and the love which seeks to promote the goodness as well as the happiness of man. Now, though the religion after which we aspire is the developed form, we must be patient if we find minds, that sympathize with us in many things, still in the rudimentary stage. Many

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our religious life itself, considered in its simplest form; second, our claim to mental freedom; third, our reverence for Jesus Christ; fourth, our endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology; fifth, our Antitrinitarianism or Unitarianism proper.

Now I notice these separately for the convenience of treatment, though I know of course that they do not exist as separate elements. They run into one another, and are blended in our minds into one living whole. First of all, there can be no question that among sincere Unitarian Christians there is a universal *consensus* in holding, or aspiring to hold, religion, in its simple essence of a life of love for goodness, opening into love for God and love for man. I say love for goodness, because it seems to me there is often at least a rudimentary stage of religion, in which, like a precious flower in the bud, it has not yet developed into the expanded blossom of love to God and love to man. There is a stage when the mind has only awakened to moral consciousness, has become sensible of a higher and lower within itself, and of an obligation to surrender itself to the higher and suppress the lower, whilst it sees, perhaps, the manifestation of this self-surrender to the higher in the character of the dear mother, or the Christ, or other venerated persons. Its religion is then simply a vague love of goodness within and without, as yet not clearly discerning the elements of which full goodness is composed. By and by, as knowledge enlarges, these are disclosed, and the love of goodness opens into the love for the perfect goodness in God, and the love which seeks to promote the goodness as well as the happiness of man. Now, though the religion after which we aspire is the developed form, we must be patient if we find minds, that sympathize with us in many things, still in the rudimentary stage. Many

in the present day, through some defect of nature, some perversity of education, or the blighting influence of some false philosophy, seem, as in the case of John Stuart Mill, to have the development of religion arrested, at least on the side of the love to God. But I would not deny the name of religion even to this rudimentary stage, and I think it is not for us Unitarians to quench the smoking flax by casting any word of scorn upon it, but to believe rather that it contains the elements which may by and by be fanned into the noblest, fullest flame. We all, then, have the rudimentary form, and without losing that, we have, or seek to have, the developed form of love to God and love to man into which it grows. In our prayers on the Sunday, which are, I hope, some expression of our life in the week, the soul flows forth in adoring, wondering, self-dedicating love to the Father Spirit. It seeks to break loose from the entanglements of earth and sense, and deliver itself up to live for a season in His immediate presence, to forget its own littleness in His greatness, its deformities in His beauty, its sin in His righteousness, its sorrows in His love, its short life below in the hope of sharing His eternity above. In these our prayers the soul flows out also in love to man, and so, in longing for those human virtues which can alone promote man's welfare, and which coming from love make it, as Paul has said, the fulfilling of the law. That human love flows out too in yearning to have all the burdens of sin and woe lifted from human hearts, to see the light of the knowledge of God lighting up the dark places of the earth, to see the dawn of the heavenly kingdom brighten year by year. In all this, and in seeking the life which flows from it, we are perfectly one.

Next to this common element of simple essential religion,

I may perhaps put our claim to mental liberty. *This*, I take it, is an element perfectly common to all Unitarian Christians. And it is in our view invested also with a religious character; for our claim to mental liberty is, if I understand it, only a claim to be free from the usurped authority of man in order to give ourselves to the rightful authority of God. Our claim to *liberty* of mind is, I think, always, consciously or unconsciously, accompanied by a claim to *trust* the mind, which is a claim to trust God who speaks through the mind. For I think we generally recognize Reason and Conscience, the oracles of the mind, as oracles through which God directly or indirectly speaks within us; and so in breaking from all the dogmatic bonds of men, we are only like the child who breaks from the arms of strangers to run and throw itself into the arms of the mother. Our assertion of the right of liberty is no self-assertion. We ask not to think as we will, but as God wills—not as we please, but as God pleases. Believing the ultimate laws of our reason, as well as those of our conscience, to be the guidance of the great hand of God, in giving up all self-will and prejudice to be led by them we are giving ourselves in a truly religious spirit to Him, to "walk with Him as dear children." This same spirit of freedom and trust of mind carries us necessarily on to reverence for science, and for all the knowledge which trusted reason and conscience have brought us. Since God leads our souls, the ever-widening truths in this His universe to which He is leading us are also His revelations, and bring us nearer to Him by disclosing the secrets of His thought and the methods of His action. We are assuredly one in our claim to mental liberty.

3rdly. We are one in deep, tender reverence for him whose name we bear, the great Master, Jesus Christ. For-

give me if I speak of this common element in this wide and indefinite way. I wish to stand this evening on the firm ground of our agreements, and you know that it is in connection with our reverence for Christ that our greatest disagreements appear. It must be so. There is a field of critical and philosophical thought surrounding the person and life of Christ, on which, claiming to use our liberty and trust to our own souls, we can scarcely fail to differ. Accordingly, we do differ in our critical estimate of the recorded facts of the Master's life; we differ in the philosophy by which we interpret these facts, by which we conceive of his nature, and assign him his place in God's providential thought and the world's history. Yet, amid all our diversities, there is certainly among all who claim to be Unitarian *Christians* a common reverence for Christ; a reverence for him as the spiritual rock from which has historically flowed the fountain which has become the stream of our Christian life; a reverence for him as the impersonation of our religion in its universal aspect of love for Goodness, love for God, and love for Man. I would go further, and say that Christ is to many of us an impersonation of our religion also in its reverence and claim for liberty, and in all that reverence for science and intellectual development which flows therefrom. For Jesus seems to us, breaking away in that his age of mental slavery from the bonds of tradition in which he was brought up, and trusting himself to the simple universal teachings of God—Jesus seems to us the noblest hero of mental liberty that the world's history presents. But whether all Unitarians agree with this or not, they will agree that they escape from the region of "dry abstract truths without a way to the human heart," in which Mr. Gladstone seems to imagine that we always dwell, by seeing the universal

part of their religion reflected in a person, the revered, beloved person of Jesus Christ. Thus their religion becomes living, warm, human. Their conceptions of goodness, God, man, become tinted with colours from his life and character. Goodness is that which they see embodied in him; God is loved as seen imaged in him; man is honoured and seen to be worthy of their love because man's nature is revealed in him. It is by living in him and with him, loving goodness, God and man with him, that they learn to live. It is by dying with him in his death, surrendering ourselves as living sacrifices to the Father, that they receive the atonement, the reconciliation to God. Such reverence as this is, I think, truly common. I know that many among us cannot be satisfied with this. They want all to go with them into the critical and philosophical theories which they hold regarding Christ; and I speak of no particular school among us; I speak of all schools alike. It is, I have no doubt, a cause of sorrow with all of us that we cannot take our fellow-worshippers with us into what seems to us the larger, holier truth. And yet, dear brethren, it is a great thing to be one, as we are, in our reverence for this "author and finisher of our faith." We do all in this reverence practically call him Lord, Master; we do all sit together at his feet as loving disciples; we do all confess his authority over us; for what is that authority but the authority of our own religion impersonated in him, the authority of our own souls, which find themselves reflected in him? All parties among us profess to regard with reverence the spirit of the teachings of Dr. Channing. Now that whole spirit seems to me embodied in one significant passage in his discourse on Love to Christ: "What is it that constitutes Christ's claim to love and respect? What is it that is to be loved in Christ?

Why are we to hold Christ dear? I answer, there is but one ground for virtuous affection in the universe, but one object worthy of cherished and enduring love in heaven or on earth, and that is moral goodness. I know no exception to this principle. I can conceive of no being who can have any claim to affection but what rests on his character, meaning by this the spirit and principle which constitute his mind and from which he acts." Let us take to our souls this great thought of Channing, and whatever we may think of the imperfection of our brother's theories, let us be content for him to share with us our Master's name, if only he shares with us some of the disciple's reverence. Let us be content to say with the Apostle, "Grace be with all those who love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity."

A fourth element of Unitarian Christianity common to us all is the endeavour after a spiritual and rational, or, as it has been called, scientific theology. This head will be thought by some to be included under the head of mental liberty. But as many may not immediately see how the endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology follows from the exercise of our liberty, I have thought better to give it an especial consideration. I would say, then, that this endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology follows both from our religion and our liberty. First, our religion needs a theology to feed it, then our liberty requires that such theology should be spiritual and rational, by which I mean a theology brought, by the exercise upon it of our mental liberty, into accordance with the spiritual judgments of our conscience and the rational judgments of our reason. First, our religion needs a theology. The life of religion will ever need to be fed by the food of thought regarding things divine. That life can no more exist without that thought, than the

life of this bodily frame can exist without material food. To speak contemptuously of theology because it is not religion, is like speaking contemptuously of bread because it is not the life of which it is the staff. We must therefore have a theology with our religion; but then, secondly, in accordance with our first principle of claim to *mental freedom* in order *to trust the oracles within*, we must have that theology spiritual and rational. Yet, in forming this theology, whilst we are guided by the same common principles of inquiry, we naturally come to very various conclusions of doctrine. This is not wonderful if we consider to what errors we are liable in interpreting the voices of conscience and reason; how apt we are to mistake our own prejudices for their decisions; and what different amounts of knowledge we bring to them as data for their judgments. And yet, great as are our differences, I suspect that there is on the whole more substantial agreement among us than would be found in any other religious body; and I believe this agreement will become larger and larger as sound education advances. I believe all this because we begin with the same great principle of free thought, which really means carrying our beliefs for arbitration to the same tribunals of the soul. Our experience, then, notwithstanding our divergences, coincides with our instinct, and encourages us to go on in the path of free and reverent thought, assured that it is the right path, and that if we press boldly forward we shall only go from truth to truth, from light to light. Yes, we must go on; and we shall make our theology more spiritual and more rational as we turn the light of God within us on the ways of His providence in the past, on the laws in which He works in universe and in soul in the present. Yes, we must go on; and

science and philosophy and scholarship shall be tributaries to the stream of our theology—a theology which shall feed our piety by ever larger revelations of the grandeur and loveliness of God, and shall feed our philanthropy by ever larger disclosures of possibilities for man. We must go on, fearless in our trust in truth. We must go on with Science; and if now she seems to be for a season shutting up the mind in the prison-house, and binding it with the chains of materialism, we must still only try to understand more deeply her meaning, and by and by we shall find her changing into the delivering angel, coming with a great light to open the prison doors and make the chains fall off. We must go on with Philosophy; and if now, leading the mind up her mountain heights, she seems to have brought it into the region of cloud, where it is blinded with the mists of the unknowableness or the impersonality of God, we must still cling to her and ask her to go forward, and by and by she will lead us above the mists into God's open light, and beneath His clear, everlasting heavens again.

The fifth element common to all Unitarian Christians is their protest against Trinitarian error, that is, their Antitrinitarianism, or Unitarianism proper. Of course this is a part of our spiritual and rational theology; but it is our spiritual and rational theology in its belligerent—its polemic—attitude. If there were no Trinitarian errors in Christendom around us, we should never dream of an Antitrinitarian attitude or Antitrinitarian name. We are like colonists who have had to build their city in presence of hostile forces. But for these, they might have arranged it simply in accordance with their own needs and their own conceptions of symmetry and beauty. But

now they have been obliged to build upon the heights, and surround their city with a wall strengthened by many a tower and mounted with many a threatening gun.

We, but for the presence of the great host of Trinitarian errors, might have built our city of theology, placed the palaces and all the pleasant places of its noblest thoughts as we needed or desired them for ourselves; but now we have been obliged to erect our wall and towers, and point our guns of Unitarian protest against these errors. And our whole city of theological belief has been called after our Unitarian, that is, Antitrinitarian, fortifications, much as many an English city, like Chester and Manchester, anciently received its name—as Castra—from the bulwarks that partly or wholly surrounded it. It is certainly a misfortune that our faith should be named from its least permanent and least essential characteristic. For as we find many a city named once after its fortifications, now, in these days of peace, with its ramparts levelled and even all traces of them lost, so let us hope it may be hereafter with our Antitrinitarian protest. Trinitarianism may pass away, and then we shall build our theology for our own internal needs and not for external protest, and there will be no more reason for calling ourselves Unitarians, that is, Antitrinitarians, than for calling ourselves Anti-Gnostics or Anti-Ebionites, or Anti- any other dead and forgotten sect.

That time, however, has not yet come. Our protest we must still continue to make; and if we cannot change our name, we must continue boldly to wear it; only taking care, however, that as long as it is the name for our religious community, and as long as we have no other name to cover the whole religious life and opinions of that community, we jealously watch that it does not stand for any-

thing less than this—that it does not narrow our souls down to the narrowness of its proper significance, and make us think of our religion as only sectarian and polemic. There are good and noble Unitarians who rejoice in being fighters. Their place is on the wall and by the guns, and their delight is in the shout of war. Well, they are fine fellows and valuable helpers. We could not do without them. But still we must not let them make Unitarian Christianity mean only our Antitrinitarian fortifications, ignoring the great city itself of positive doctrines and life that lies behind. In thinking of ourselves as Unitarians, we must not think of ourselves as soldiers only of the walls, but as citizens also of the great city of our theology.

And now if I have, however inadequately, yet to some extent *truly*, interpreted our common Unitarian consciousness—if these things, simple religion, claim to mental liberty reverence for Christ, endeavour after a spiritual and rational theology, Unitarian protest against Trinitarian errors, are the things which lie nearest to our hearts, the things in which we are one body in Christ, things which will bear judging, too, by the universal consciousness—then, I think, I have shown the revelation of a very great and very solemn vocation. These things *make* our vocation. They are God's indications in our souls of what He is calling us in common to do. He is calling us in drawing these common breathings of a holy music from our souls. These, rising, make one grand Unitarian anthem, which, if we can but hear and interpret, will make us a people knit together by a grand sympathy in a grand faith, standing shoulder to shoulder in a grand and glorious work.

Brethren, it is plain that we are called to live and give a religion seeing itself in Christ, and also associated with

liberty, which means associated with knowledge; a religion which shall be the fulness of all the deepest reverence of the soul with all the freest, largest, truest thought of the mind. Ours is the work, suggested by the poet, to

> "Let knowledge grow from more to more,
> But more of reverence in us dwell,
> That mind and soul, according well,
> May make one music as before."

Ours is the work to live such a religion and give it to the world—to live it first, or we cannot give it. We seek to commend the lamp of our theology to the masses. It is of little use for us to display the framework, and show how reasonable and simple and yet beautiful it is. We must show men a bright flame of religion burning in it. Our vocation in general may be summed up in one word—it is to combine religion with freedom, that is with a free theology. It is, then, to show the world, what others besides Mr. Gladstone seem to doubt, that there can be religion with freedom; that there can be a Church with an earnest religious life—our Church now, and therefore a grand Catholic Church hereafter—founded, not on dogmas or traditions, but on common affections and common trusts in the oracles in the human soul. Ah! can we come up to this vocation? Can we walk worthy of it? It is not easy to come up to it; we must not flatter ourselves that we have come up to it. Sometimes we are very near it, but we oft fall back again. To unite liberty and religion, to lay the foundations of the Catholic Church, of the City of God, not in the perishable materials of common dogmas, but in the eternal precious stones of common spiritual trusts,—this, as you know, is one of the hardest things in the world; for either religion is apt to shackle liberty, or liberty to blight religion. In no other church

as yet has it been possible to harmonize the two. And *we* have undertaken the difficult task. Ah! shall the result only be to show that the task must be sorrowfully given up as impracticable still? It is difficult to hold religion and yet not give up liberty. The result of liberty, as we have seen, is difference of theological opinion, and this difference it is hard for the religious mind to bear. When my brother, dwelling with me in the same religious home, claiming to be of the same household of faith, wearing, and perhaps I may think *dishonouring*, the same family name, nourished too by the mother's milk of the same religious life,—when he turns round upon me and denies as baneful error what I revere as precious truth, denounces as poisonous superstition what I feel to be the very daily bread of my life,—he hurts me, and must hurt me because he throws slight on things with which my reverence is deeply interwoven. He tends to take away from me and from others what seems to me most needful to the religious life. And so I know, on the other hand, that if I deny what my brother holds dear and sacred, I cause similar pain to him. Now, brethren, the question for us is, Can we learn loyally and patiently to bear this pain without losing our religious earnestness, on the one hand, or letting that pain repel us from our brother or make us seek to check his liberty, on the other? Here is the difficulty which ever opposes the strength of our organization. It is here that comes in the fatal dissociating force that tends to make our body a mere rope of sand. Ah! can we watch and overcome this repellant force? We can do so only by a great-souled loyalty to our principles, only by a wise and manful government of ourselves. When our brother exercises his liberty according to his right, can we abstain from pleading our pain as

a bar to that liberty, as a cause for his silence? Can we so master our pain as that it shall not become a dissociating force to separate between our brother and ourselves—make us eager to thrust him from our religious home or deny him the use of the family name? If we cannot come up to this loyalty, if we cannot exercise this government of self, then we cannot come up to our vocation. Our theory of combining liberty with religion is but a fine theory still; we do our part to show that in practice it remains a hopeless thing.

We shall be helped to bear the pain of difference by keeping in mind that if God does mean us to be free, free to believe that which to our own minds appears to be the truth, then even to believe amiss, if we have come to believe by exercising faithful inquiry, cannot be regarded by Him with any moral disapproval. And surely what *God* does not blame, *we* have no right to shrink from as if it were a sin. And if God looks upon our varieties of belief with all-patient eye, we may be sure that He cannot think any one form of belief, however correct, to be all essential to our religious life. Experience tells us that this is true; for though the religious life is nourished by theological belief, as the bodily life is nourished by food, happily vitality may be supported by very different foods; and as no land with its particular material diet can boast that it alone nourishes strong and beautiful bodies, so no church, no sect, no school with its particular theological diet, can boast that it alone nourishes strong and beautiful souls. There is no doubt that souls which have a noble theology to live from enjoy a great advantage, yet somehow it happens that the advantage is not always used; and there are those who are like the three children in the story of Daniel, and draw more nourishment for

their strength and beauty from a theology as of poor pulse and water, than others draw from one which is like the king's rich meat.

Again, we may help ourselves to bear this pain of difference from our opinion by just looking at our opinion and asking what there is in it that should make us, as it were, fall down and worship it as if it were infallible and divine.

Let each of us imagine the body of our theological opinions written down on a private scroll which we carry in our bosom. Now let each one take out the scroll and read it over, and ask himself if he can honestly say that every one of the opinions there written down has been come to in the sincere desire to find the very truth. Can he honestly affirm that he has gone with each opinion right into the inner court of judgment, and submitted it to the judges, Conscience and Reason, there? Ah! must he not confess, on the contrary, how often, rather, he has allowed himself to be detained by the crowd of his own prejudices, inclinations and passions in the outer court, and has allowed his opinion to be the mere echo of the voices of that meaner crowd? Or even if any one can feel sure that he has gone with any opinion to the ultimate judges of truth and right, can he also feel sure that he provided himself with all the knowledge he could gain in order to form the case to lay before the judges for their judgment? When the decision to be formed was a critical one, has he gone to criticism? or when it was a philosophical one, has he gone to philosophy? or if a scientific one, has he gone to science for the information needed? Can he say that he has not often judged of the truth of an opinion, not by evidence for or against it, but by a bias suggested by its supposed practical tendency? I do not know, brethren, how it may be with you, but for myself I

could not dare to be sure that with any single opinion that I hold I had been thus perfectly truthful.

Let each of us look on this scroll of his opinions, and ask himself if this is what he can venture to hold up as if it were a sacred standard of unquestionable truth, if this is what he dares to call *the truth*, condemning his brother as a dangerous heretic because he differs from it.

And observe, brethren, I am saying this again to no school among us in particular, but to all schools alike; for this self-delusion that *our* opinion, however formed, is *the truth*, belongs to all schools—alas! to all human nature.

We see then this difficulty of really so holding religion as not to give up liberty. Can we try more to overcome it and come up to our vocation, which sets us to make the union of the two?

But now, once more, if it is difficult to hold religion without giving up liberty, it is still more difficult to hold liberty and yet in no way give up religion. This is our vocation still. Let us remember our conception of religion. It is holy *emotion* working out holy *life*. Religion, observe, *is* emotion at its source. It is love, and surely love is emotion—love for goodness, love for God, love for man. Now it is clear that this emotion, this love, must be fed by some belief regarding its objects. He, for example, who does not *believe* in goodness cannot love goodness. He who does not believe in God, and in His lovableness too, cannot love God. Now it is the result of freedom—that is, of free thought—to interfere very much with the beliefs by which the religious emotions need to be fed, and so to make religion difficult, or even to dry it up altogether. The beliefs by which our religion is nourished have been compared this evening to bread, the bread of

life. Let us take the other familiar figure and compare them to water—the water of life. Consider the theological beliefs belonging to different churches as springs flowing at different levels, some down on the very plain, some higher up on mountain sides, and some among the very mountain heights. Now it is the result of free thought to detach and turn away the mind from all the springs of lower and more popular religious beliefs, leaving none possible to their use but very high ones, flowing from the mountain heights where Conscience and Reason reign. Go into many of the churches around us, where evangelists of the type of Mr. Moody, or Ritualists or Romanists of other types, appeal to multitudes and seem to awaken tides of religious emotion, and ask how it is all done. You will find that the secret is, that the preachers lead their hearers to thoughts, to springs of theological belief, on a low level. The people can more easily get to them, and do get to them and drink freely, and go away, I have no doubt, refreshed and strengthened to live a better life. A preacher with us, were he the mightiest prophet, has no such advantage. He addresses men who have left those lower springs, who look upon them with aversion as turbid and poisoned waters. He must point Unitarian hearers to the only springs their free thought has left them, far up among the mountain heights. He must point them to such truths as the eternal beauty and sanctity of goodness, the Fatherhood and eternal goodness and immanence of God, the divine childhood as well as human brotherhood of man, the revelation of our true nature and life, and relation to God and hope of immortality in Jesus Christ. And these lie very high; and simple as it seems to *approach* them, it is very, very difficult to reach them so as to *believe* them with all

the heart and soul. It is difficult intellectually, and it is difficult morally. It is difficult intellectually. The thoughts which our theology presents, if simple thoughts, are still great thoughts, thoughts which cannot be realized without some mental effort. The mind must give itself up to them —will, understanding, imagination—in order to grasp them; and multitudes come to their religion in an indolent frame of mind, as to a subject that needs no thought. Alas! no mind, as long as it abandons itself to this indolent mood, will ever climb to the springs of our Unitarian belief. There are many who, through the exercise of their free thought, get far away above the springs of the popular faith, and yet fail to reach the higher springs, and very much, I cannot help thinking, because they will not exert the mental effort and perseverance necessary to climb to them. When in their newly-found liberty they first break away from the popular superstitions, they seem to go on joyously for a time, mounting higher and higher in the freer air. But by and by they get into the region of mists, the mists of doubt, and their zeal for truth begins to slacken. They seem to lose all power of pushing forward, and, as if doomed by some fatality, they go round and round in that same region of mist, never emerging above it. We may be assured that the exercise of free thought will always leave some of these dwellers in the mist among us. These will be generally somewhat dead and cold themselves, through the absence of any intensity of religious conviction, and so they will be like icebergs, chilling the whole moral air around them. Ah! my friends, who of us does not feel how depressing it is to live in a church with those who have no strength of religious conviction, and how their apathy makes us almost ashamed to have any intensity of religious conviction ourselves!

For these dwellers in the mist, and for all of us, there needs the exercise of a greater intellectual bravery and faithfulness in religion.

But, alas! there is the still greater moral difficulty in getting up to the lofty springs of our faith. Even those of us who never seem to doubt, still do not drink habitually from the higher springs, just because they are too high morally for us to reach. Religion is Love; and we shall not love, not deliver ourselves to our love, as long as we are not prepared to do what that love demands. The rich man in the Gospel would have given himself to his love for Jesus, to follow with Peter, James and John, but that love demanded a sacrifice too great for him to make, and he went sorrowful away. Now there is this difficulty in the way of our giving ourselves up to believe our theology with all our hearts, that the high love to which it appeals requires self-sacrifice which we are not often prepared to make. Ah! there lies our greatest difficulty. Our theology is as yet too high for our moral strength; we do not, and we cannot, without more heroism, come up to it. Now I do not wish to indulge in any morbid self-depreciation, but I wish also to discourage any unwarranted self-satisfaction. There is, no doubt, much religious life among us; but if we can be satisfied with this, we must have a very inadequate conception of the ideal which our theology presents. Let us put away for ever those foolish pleas by which we try to hide from ourselves a poverty and coldness in our religious life of which we are truly conscious. Let us no longer say, Oh, we have abundant religious life, only through our taste and culture we are an undemonstrative people, and do not show it. My friends, I look into my own heart, and see how hollow such excuses are. Ah! do I not know by my own experience that there is a deficiency

in the religious life simply because of the great difficulty in coming up to the high springs of faith? Do I not know too surely that my heart is stubbornly hard and dry? Do I not know that I do not, except in rarest moments, get up to my belief in God, and experience that love of God of which the Master speaks, "with all the heart, with all the soul, with all the mind, and with all the strength"? And do I not know that it is because the thought of God which my theology presents is too high for me; it does not touch me, because I do not strain towards it; I do not surrender myself to it, alas! because the weight of earthly sin and habit keeps me back? Ah! how can I delight to go up and believe in God, think of Him in all His perfect goodness, allow that thought to fill my soul, unless I am prepared to surrender myself to the Eternal Goodness, to be and to do what it demands?

And so, again, with regard to that love for my neighbour as myself, that enthusiasm of humanity which I see in Jesus. Do I not know how little I really feel it, and simply because the belief in man, and what I can do for him, and the kingdom of God I can help to bring in, is too high for me, I cannot through my selfishness come up to it? Do I not know that if I really go up to it, giving myself up to this Christ-like love for man, I must be prepared to go forth and sacrifice time and ease and inclination and means to carry it out; and my dull nature replies, "I cannot do it," and I dare not go and drink of the water which might inspire me to do what I am not prepared to do?

Brethren, am I alone in this sorrowful experience? Do not many hearts respond to the confession that our religious life has not yet come up to our theology, and that we have not yet overcome the great difficulty of holding

religion in union with liberty? Can we resolve to make a greater effort to come up to our vocation? We must, if we are ever to become that power in the world of which we dream. We have found a grand and glorious theology up among the eternal heights. But when we go forth to commend that theology to the world, and assure them how pure and good its waters are, men's hearts virtually say to us, "Yes, your theology seems very reasonable, very beautiful, but how about your religion? Do these springs which you say are so pure and wholesome, then, feed your souls with a religious life larger and deeper than is felt among churches fed by lower and impurer streams? Let us look into your churches. How does your theology work? You profess, for example, to hold the thought of God as a Father lovely with all holiness and goodness and fatherly compassion. You remove from His face, as you say, all the clouds of unrighteous wrath with which orthodox error has darkened it. Well, then, does your thought of God in all its loftiness and purity act upon you and awaken in you a warmer, deeper, devouter love than is felt by your orthodox fellow-christians?

"You profess to honour Christ, not, with Christendom in general, because he is God as well as man, but because he is the highest example of moral loveliness which history presents. Does, then, that moral loveliness in Christ awaken in your souls a love greater or more operative on the moral life than the love excited towards him by what you call an idolatrous mistake?

"Once more, you profess to love man, not as Christians in general love him, but simply as a brother and as a child of God. You yearn over the ignorant and the sinful, not as seeing them lying under a dreadful doom to eternal woe, but simply as lying in degradation and moral ruin, far from

God and their own true life, and you would raise them and restore them to themselves and God. Again, does this thought of man really kindle in your hearts the enthusiasm of humanity? Does it really make you take upon you the sins and sorrows of your fellow-men, and bear them as your own? Does that love send you out in missions and other instrumentalities to fight more zealously than others against the great evils of society—ignorance, drunkenness, pauperism, vice and crime? Is your church life—being inspired by such lofty truths—more ardent than that of others? United by such grand common hopes, aspirations, emotions, do you feel bound to one another, hallowed, as it were, to one another?" Ah! what shall we say to questions like these? Simply that they make us feel how much we have to do to walk worthy of our calling; they make us feel that we have not already attained, are not already perfect, but must still follow after, counting not ourselves to have apprehended, but, "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before," must "press toward the mark for the prize of the high *calling*—calling of God in Christ Jesus." Amen.

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GOSPEL FREEDOM.

SERMON

AT THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

British and Foreign Unitarian Association,

May 23rd, 1877.

BY

ALEXANDER GORDON, M.A.

VIDETE QUONIAM NON SOLI MIHI LABORAVI
SED OMNIBUS EXQUIRENTIBUS VERITATEM.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,

14, Henrietta Street, Covent garden, London, and
20, South Frederick Street, Edinburgh.

TO

ROBERT SPEARS

WITH

HIGH RESPECT FOR HIS LABOURS

AND

WARM REGARD FOR HIS FRIENDSHIP

The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand.—Isaiah xxxii. 8.

Could we, this mid-May morning, transport ourselves back to that early century, the birth-time of our faith; could we gain access to the Eastern land where it was cradled; could we change scene and time, at the bidding of fruitful fancy; could we put away the prepossessions which have been accumulating through all our history, till they have become a part, almost, of our Christian mind, we should be instructed, I am sure, though we might be startled, and even perhaps not a little shocked, in respect of many things which now we take as matters of course, and regard with what has come to be in us a natural reverence. We open the volume of the New Testament, and we come to the *roll of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the heir of David, the representative of Abraham.* In the nascent age of Christianity, how would that document have struck an outsider, supposing him to have become acquainted with it? Who, he might ask, is the man whose history is thus ushered into the world, and through whom do we receive the account?

The reply might tell him that this Jesus represents, by nationality and by religion, one Abraham, a patriarch of ancient time, a wandering chieftain of the Eastern world, who came southward in search of a home and a resting-place, from the weird region where the Chaldees dwelt; who was born near the banks of the mighty Euphrates, penetrated in his journeyings to the rich bed of the sacred Nile, and, established at last in the middle realm of Canaan, ended his days not far from Jordan's swift and deep and crooked stream. Living among idolaters, he stands forth as the Friend of God. To him is traced back the spiritual

power. Systems have been consolidated on this basis. Theologies have flourished, fed by this sap of life.

And here rests the modern difficulty in the reception of Christianity. The success of Christianity is its peril. A peculiar blindness is generated by this environment of doctrine and system. A peculiar difficulty besets us in apprehending One who comes to us crowded round with a motley troop claiming to be his inseparable associates. There is a Church, nay there is a host of Churches, friendly, indifferent, alien, or fiercely hostile to each other, all of which assume to reproduce the life of Christianity. There is a creed, nay there is a collection of creeds, some openly competing, others professing to be identical but in reality most unlike, all of which profess to interpret the mind and re-issue the teaching of Christ. Nevertheless Christianity, if we define it, is not a revealed theology, though it has transformed men's minds in relation to God. Christianity is not an inspired ethic, though it has influenced the whole theory of moral conduct. Christianity is not an authoritative Church system, though it has moulded the ecclesiastical polities of Christendom. Christianity, in its essence, is the supernatural power of a divine life, shown in Christ and communicated to his followers. The developments of Christianity, or its corruptions, or both, hide their originator; and, in the multitude of Christian thoughts and things, Christ is often lost.

Thus the younger generation of workers and worshippers, in all Churches, is saturated with a characteristic scepticism. I do not say with positive unbelief, but with scepticism. The feeling, sometimes uneasily lurking in the mind, sometimes explicitly declared, is this: 'We have not been taken to the fountain-head; the chalice has poison in it, as well as Christ; our faith has been cheated with lesser things than the eternal realities.' It may well be that the complaint, though often reasonable enough, is not always just. An old and rooted, that is to say, a stable and persistent Christianity, will ever, by the younger race of Christians, if only because it speaks in an ancient dialect, be deemed effete.

(3) Now it was said of the forerunner of Christ, that he

would fulfil an ancient prophecy, which spake of turning *the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.* It was felt that in the estrangement between the elder and the rising generation there were premonitions of social and religious mischief, which threatened to *smite the earth with a curse.* Of the Baptist it was declared that he would accomplish his fulfilment of prophecy in a particular way; by bringing back the disobedient thoughts and wandering desires of the younger race to *the wisdom of the just*—whose hearts would open, with a fatherly recognition, to receive and to forgive them. A noble office was this in its time; a much-needed revolution, at the critical juncture when John came forth to his mission. It was an effort of recurrence to the wholesomer relations of more primitive days. For John, with all his startling enthusiasm, was essentially conservative, in the true, good, patriotic, and lofty sense of the word. He went behind the modern traditions of Hebrew religion to the brighter and better tone of an elder Hebrew day. He came in the spirit and power of Elias. He went before the Lord to do an Elias-work over again. Though not *that Light*, he bore a faithful witness to its coming, and did what reconciling work was possible till it dawned.

Our Lord, when he came, prognosticated a deeper, and, at first, a much more disturbing change. It is a change propounded by himself in a fashion which sometimes pains, and often puzzles us. 'Peace? No, but division. A sword, a fire, I bring upon the earth.' And the kind of division is foreseen and described. *The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother-in-law against the daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.*

Now this is a division of sympathy and of opinion perfectly natural, and, in a degree, inevitable. It takes place in every religion, without exception. No two succeeding generations look at their hereditary faith from precisely the same point of view, or lay stress on exactly the same features of it. Though the creed remain unrevised upon the statute-

book, its proportions alter; the interest in it shifts from one quarter to another. Virtually there is division, though nominally there may be adherence to a standard of unison. The old lament and scold, and lay down the law about duties; the young exult and defy, and lift up the standard of rights. This belongs to human nature; and must needs ever recur where two generations are strongly interested in the same subject. It requires both a firm grasp of principle and a gracious tact in applying it, to steer a right course at such a crisis.

(4) Our guiding light is to be found in recollecting the principle that there are always two ways of dealing with human nature. It may be urged from within, or forced from without; compelled into a reluctant obedience, or invited to a spontaneous surrender. These are two opposite methods of introducing the understanding to its beliefs, and the conscience to its duties. The one process may be said to give truth to the mind; the other gives the mind to truth. In a great variety of cases the practical result achieved may appear the same; yet it is of the first importance to understand clearly the divergence of the two methods. Upon our distinct apprehension of this difference depends our perception of the contrast between instruction and education, between the ethics of custom and the religious life, between conformity to a pattern and transformation by a principle, between Law and Gospel. Deal with a man on the level implied in the first of these alternatives, viz., as a receptacle for knowledge and a tool for action, and you may make him well-informed, respectable, a good disciple, devout—but still a slave. You cannot, on these terms, fire him with genius, or elevate him into an apostle. Treat a man in the spirit suggested by the second alternative, viz., as a source of movement and a centre of development, and you may go further. You may add thought to his learning, give aspiration to his piety, and open the door of infinite insight to his faith.

Frequently it is assumed, that though the adoption of the latter alternative secures a higher training for the exceptional few, yet for mankind at large the mechanical treatment is practically the safest and the best. It sets a man

on the rails, and conducts him straight to what, he is told, is his proper destination. It is true there is none of the gladsomeness of unfettered travel in free air; nor anything of the keen curiosity of adventure in a country unknown. Yet, since for civilised man, directness of transit is preferable to splendour of route; it is urged that a steady virtue forms a more practicable way to heaven than a noble enthusiasm. It might be easy to show that the highest aim of this presumed expedient and practical way of conducting men to their destiny, is poor and trivial, compared with the glimpses of better things afforded by the more generous course of trusting men to their aspirations. The superior loftiness of conception, which is the prerogative of the latter, will not be denied even by the advocates of the former. Only they will say: It is better to set a fair pattern that humanity can follow, than to point an ideal that human frailty cannot reach. It is wise to begin by securing for the average mass of men a certain amount of conventional goodness and wisdom, though one might despair of making them really great or holy.

I cannot accept this apology for the lower method; it fails to satisfy its pretensions. It is not practical; for the characters of men are so widely different that no spiritual mechanism can be found, at once elastic enough to fit all minds, and rigid enough to reduce all to a uniform standard of faith and practice. And though of these differences the most striking are comparatively few in number, so that men are without difficulty grouped into classes, each exhibiting a pretty level type of intellect and of activity; yet a closer scrutiny of human character reveals divergences, which, while they do indeed mark off classes of men and men, far from stopping short at this point, are minute enough to individualise man and man. The shades of mental distinction are in reality infinite. Every human character has its separate impress, and will not take the shape you want to give it, though you begin your experiments with it never so young, and press down never so hard the die of an enforced uniformity. There is constantly some awkward feature occurring in the copy which the original did not possess, and which no external power has bestowed; a feature which took its

growth from within, not its mould from without; a feature which testifies to the presence of a power, in the material with which you presume to work, that is naturally and fatally repugnant to every design you may cherish of obtaining fair copies of a stereotyped pattern.

Prove the experiment practical, and you are still far off from the proof that it is wise. For the obstacle which it has to overcome is nothing else than the inherent and uncontrollable energy of the human soul; and to subdue it is to kill the very heart of life in the man, and give him the fixedness of spiritual death. That which you seek to repress is higher than that which you strive to impart. For a living soul there is hope, however far he may have wandered out of the track—but who can wake the dead? Surely no erring impetuosity of thought or of temperament is half so frightful as the stony look, which betokens that beneath the calm, well-regulated exterior, the pulse of our humanity has ceased to beat.

The gist of Christ's own dealing with this oft-recurring problem is that he seems to contemplate it with perfect ease; to provide for its return; to speak of it with emotion, and yet without alarm or deprecation; to advertise it as certain to characterise his religion in a special manner. So, indeed, it does. We use sometimes the noble word of our text to differentiate a Christianity which trusts us; but, in its ancient and best sense, the word Liberal may be taken as part of the very definition of Christianity. It is true that the Liberal label has been debased in many of its current applications, till it has come to cover much that is presumptuous and ill-founded in speculation and theology; much inconsiderate expenditure in the work of social charity; and in politics, much timid and empty talk;—just the very faults which Isaiah would exclude from the kingdom of righteousness, in his prophecy of the time when *the heart of the rash shall understand knowledge;* when *the churl shall be no more said to be bountiful;* and when *the tongue of the stammerers shall be ready to speak plainly.* True Christianity—liberal in this honourable sense of the word liberal—allows for the encounter of the old and the new, for the

contest of tradition and disobedience; and allows for it in a spirit which is foreign to the spirit of other religions. For Christianity is a religion of progress, and progress implies permission of differences, even of differences from the Truth. To each age of believers it says: 'Speak your mind; hold your own; act up to your thought; maintain and deliver your truest and your best.'

(5) No Christian body has been more practically imbued with the spirit of this permission than our own. No fold of the Flock has been more possessed with a sense of the duty of encouraging the young lambs to bleat and skip in their fashion, as well as the rams to butt in theirs. No branch of the Vine has so completely authorised every tendril to cultivate its own twist; every bunch to mature its own grapes. As a consequence, we have never been without a diversity (amounting sometimes to an opposition) of types among us, all this century of our avowed existence. To distribute us, by some hard and fast line, into an ancient and a modern school, is to miss the right understanding either of the spirit of our liberality or its actual results. That which oft-times holds us apart is no arbitrary contrast of our opinions, but the intense individuality of our separate members and societies. We could not, if we would, either describe an inclusive circle round all our forces, or bisect ourselves into two exclusive camps, by any abstract propositions of spiritual geometry. Doctrines the most allied, and as nearly identical as the varied character of human thought will permit, are yet, as held by us, so entirely personal in their growth and in their expression, that they would at once rebel against the restraint of any fixed phraseology which should endeavour to monopolise their embodiment and perpetuation. Forms of worship and Church institutions are, among us, so purely the creation of private habit and local prepossession, that no Act of Uniformity, in ritual or polity, could possibly keep us in hand.

Behold our weakness. This intense individuality is frequently treated, and by friends to our cause, as the bane and discomfiture of our religious life. But behold our peculiar and abiding strength. The differing types of doctrinal utterance and of Church life, among us, are the

direct offspring of an eager spirit of personal truthfulness, a searching sensitive honesty, which, tired of the sorry patchings up of the old raiment of 'orthodoxy,' is resolved at all hazards to stand fair with itself, to set the example of rigid integrity of language and feeling. To any one who believes that self-abandonment to conviction is the secret of religious greatness, and the mainstay of all religious influence of a lasting kind, it cannot be matter of serious regret that a body of Christians should be found willing to encourage the keen and troublesome sense of personal responsibility, even in the minutest particulars of speculation and practice. People say of us: 'I cannot tell what a Unitarian is; I do not know even where your preachers are.' True, my good friend, most true. The position of any one of us, be he member, or be he minister, is not a mere matter of course. When you say that a man is a Unitarian, you mean that he has thought out, and probably fought out, his position for himself. Even the common truths he holds in an uncommon fashion. He holds them not because they are yours, but because they are his. This is true of every section of our believers, true of every school or party among us. Whatever the peculiar merit which may attach to one for solidity, to another for sagacity, to a third for versatile energy of resource, to a fourth for historical tenure, to a fifth for sheer novelty, there is not one that is not to be respected for its conscientiousness, its candour, its earnest strife for truth. To know Unitarianism, to understand its power and its promise, to realise the nature of its progress, to be charmed with the secret of its fascination, you must make yourself acquainted with more than one section of its adherents; you must consult more than one shelf of its literature; you must hearken to more than one strain of its prophecy. The fathers cannot tell you all about it; no, nor yet the sons. There are many members in this slender little frame of our organisation, and all members have not the same office.

Coming to our actual and existing divisions, it is sufficiently obvious to remark that some of them are on grounds of Scripture interpretation and authority; some on differences of religious philosophy; some on ideas of practical

policy. But there are, I venture to suggest, deeper lines of divergence, deeper and perhaps less suspected.

(6) The earlier development of Unitarian religion centred in a new doctrine of Man and human nature. It would be too much to say that it did so consciously or avowedly. A view exists, before it is traced to its source, and explained as the cause of its developments. The Catholic Church had long lived in the impalpable influence of its persuasion of the infallibility of the Pope, before it realised to itself that it did so, professed its amplified belief, and was ripe for the promulgation of the dogma. The substitution-theory of righteousness was practically held, for ages, before the formulation of the doctrine of a Vicarious Atonement. Precisely so, the earlier Unitarian development really lived upon an independent doctrine of Man, without knowing how deeply its Scripture interpretation, its theology, its religious philosophy, were dependent upon the new view. Indeed, I think Unitarianism has perhaps not done itself justice, through a failure to bring out this fact. It has been, and still is, greatly misconceived, from a want of apprehension, on the part of the general Christian world, as to the radical change imported into all its language, by the newness of its doctrine of Man.

The battle of the elder Unitarianism was fought around the person of Christ. Get people right (it said) on the person of Christ, and you will get them right on the doctrine of the Trinity, on the interpretation of Scripture, and on the doctrine of the Atonement. Secure this position, and the rest will follow. Our fathers were just in their surmise. But perhaps they hardly understood, certainly they did not bring out with any sufficient explicitness, that, in engaging in this battle at all, they were assuming that they had already fought and won another battle, the key to their victory.

An ordinary Trinitarian asks me what I believe respecting the nature and person of Christ. I reply that I hold him to be a man. What! A man! The very word revolts. And why does it revolt? Because my interrogator means this by the word man: He means a being conceived

in sin, ingrained with the effect of Adam's trangression, corrupt in heart and act; within, *deceitful above all things and desperately wicked;* without, a blind, carnal creature, the child of wrath, the sport and prey of the Devil. He regards, in short, the nature of man from the unreal point of view, which the Christian world has inherited from the vehement self-abasement of St. Augustine on the one hand, or from the dyspepsia of John Calvin on the other. Whereas I, in answering his query, meant by this self-same word something altogether different. I pronounced the word man, and understood it to mean the child of God, the very offspring of His Wisdom and His Love. Human beings belong, no doubt, in great part, to the same world of organised existence which includes the ant and the ape. But we are not entirely God's workmanship; we claim also to be His children. The creed stumbles upon the truth when it says, 'The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten.' It is true, in spite of our flaws and our sins. There is that within us which God has 'not made,' which He loves because it is of Himself.

When first I began to read Channing, I was checked by the lengths that he went in characterising human nature. It was not without a species of shock that I found him, and this, not in enthusiastic passages nor only in his theological works, speaking of Man as Godlike. I thought he went beyond the record. It was a relief to me to find, in words ascribed to St. Peter, the doctrine that men *might be partakers of the divine nature.* It was some time before I became accustomed to it. But when I got accustomed to it, I recognised that Channing did but speak out the very thought which our drier English Unitarians had been holding, and had practically been teaching from (without so boldly and so directly inculcating) in the whole scope of their doctrine. This faith in Man, this revised and purified perception of what Man really is and may be, lay at the root of things with the elder Unitarians. It made them what they were; it made their system what it was. They ascended from Man to God, by way of Christ. Why did they prize, with so jealous an

esteem, the miraculous in Christ, the supernatural in inspiration? Because here they saw human nature trusted with the highest gifts, admitted to the highest counsels, visibly exalted to its ideal place. Why did they cling, with such tenacity, to the Personality, to the Providence, to the prerogative Power, and determining Sovereignty of God? Because they approached God from the human side, and soared to Him from the platform of experience.

(7) Now, the later development of Unitariantheology seeks its starting point elsewhere than in Man. Its great distinguishing peculiarity is, that instead of radiating from a new faith in Man, it radiates from a new faith in God. Indeed, it is inclined to attach itself to a name which expresses this fact with especial emphasis. If there be a heresy which it abhors, it is that very interpretation of God from the human side, which was the strong point in the theology of its ancestors; but which it caricatures now by the appellation of anthropomorphism. It makes little of the person of Christ; it takes scant interest, one way or another, in the doctrine of the Trinity; but is at home in a new thought of the nature and the action of God, and has brought this to bear on every department of its religious interest. It speaks of God's immanence, rather than of His Fatherhood; of His laws, rather than of His Providence; of His eternal goodness and secret spiritual guidance, rather than of His special helps and personal communications.

In the way of initial difficulties of apprehension by outsiders, the younger has less to overcome than had the elder Unitarianism. For its special view of God is not indigenous, but an importation; and has made way within its own boundaries even more slowly, perhaps, than with the rest of the Christian world. But still, to the ordinary Trinitarian, it stands in need of a radical explication of one great term, on the use of which depends all the force of its reasoning and its appeal. And this term is not Man, but God. It must make intelligible, in the first instance, its reply to the questions: What do you mean by God? What,

where, who is He? When made known? How accessible? It has to repudiate the spirit of Milton's invocation:—

> "Author of all being,
> Fountain of Light; thyself invisible;
> Amidst the glorious brightness where Thou sittest
> Throned inaccessible! But, when Thou shadest
> The full blaze of Thy beams, and through a cloud,
> Drawn round about Thee like a radiant shrine,
> Dark with excessive light, thy skirts appear;
> Yet dazzle heaven, that brightest seraphim
> Approach not—"

And it has to justify the spirit of Coleridge's plea:—

> "What if all of animated nature
> Be but organic harps, diversely framed,
> That tremble into thought as o'er them sweeps
> Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
> At once the soul of each and God of all."

(8) Now we, as Unitarians, are in this predicament. On the one hand, we enjoy the advantage of the multiplied gain to thought and piety presented by the co-existence of these distinct spheres of Unitarian faith. On the other hand, we labour under the disadvantage that the fathers do not understand the sons, nor the sons the fathers. What our theoretical policy, as an Association, may be, is perfectly plain. We must place ourselves in a position of absolute impartiality towards all existing (I would add all future) types of Unitarian Christianity; and so far as they are willing to trust, and to work with us, we must observe towards them all the courteous and Christian attitude of equal and uniform respect. Anything which would tend to sever the allegiance of any one type of our faith, however antiquated we may think it in ideas, however slenderly equipped with numerical following; anything which would seem to assert the supremacy of any one phase of the principles of Unitarian Christianity, however eager and novel in its language, however popular in its immediate hold; would amount to a radical disaster, not simply as dividing our forces, but as practically annihilating our unique posi-

tion of embraciveness. It is much more important that those who really have faith in the Unitarian movement, who believe that, with many an error and many a drawback, it is God's true word in Christ to the British nation, should hold together heart to heart and hand to hand, than that any particular type of ancient or of modern Unitarianism should in the meantime gain or keep the upper place.

Whether, in practical dealing, we can preserve intact this commanding ideal, evidently depends rather upon the spirit of our men, than upon any difficulty as to our principle. I am aware that I now tread upon ground that is delicate, and that I am stepping my way among topics inflamed by a considerable amount of local irritation. But I say plainly, that I see, in the meantime, no excuse whatever for disorganising our forces, or dissipating our united work, or dividing our energies; nor can I imagine that such excuse can arise hereafter, unless through some unbrotherly action (which God forbid) on the part of one set or other of our people, in relation to the religious convictions and feelings of their brother Unitarians.

I go further; and I say, that—in regard to that stone of stumbling which has been brought into our path, by the desire that we should endorse a book, the speech and tone of which, in the judgment of many, convey serious disparagements, if not actual insults, to the memory of our fathers, and to the religion of not their least honoured sons—our Association, by a solid majority, has taken the only just course, in so far as it has declined its publication; leaving that enterprise to other publishers, indifferent or hostile, and dealing in it only as we deal in any lawful literature that will fetch money. Should any partial or thoughtless act compromise on either side this deliberate settlement, every well-wisher to our prosperity would be compelled to regard it in the most serious light. To renew, for instance, a pressure for such publication, or its equivalent, would not only be to re-open strife; it would be to set the seal upon a policy of unbrotherliness; it would commit us to a kind of civil war, happily as yet without parallel in our traditions;

it would invite, and probably provoke, a retaliation of severe argument and bitter venom; it would end our hopes of harmony. *For all the law is fulfilled in one word; even in this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.* Finally, it would be most unjust to the genius of the author in question, to persist in identifying his religious repute with the outcome (however called forth) of his roughest manner and his wildest unwisdom. No candid mind would wish to estimate the greatness of Harriet Martineau by the signs of ill health and ill humour which disfigure her remarkable autobiography, and which only the feeble adulation of an enthusiast can affect to praise. Nor, in a parallel case, can any real admirer of the strongest son of Transatlantic Unitarianism desire to have him judged by the wanton hits and jibes, which remove his *Discourse* from the catalogue of serious efforts in theological science, and sink it to the ephemeral level of a masterpiece of partisan pamphleteering.

Since I have spoken of the effect of a first reading of Channing, I may venture to record the impression which a primary perusal of Parker made upon a young man's thoughts. I was introduced to this brave writer by one who held him in no common honour; one whose ministry I attended as a theological student; receiving his instructions with little accord of dogmatic view, but with a continually deepening obligation to the solid piety of his powerful and genuine nature—I mean the late William Forster. Struck with the beauty of the *Discourse on Matters pertaining to Religion;* moved by its persuasiveness; stunned now and then by the windage of its Thor's hammer, flying through the air with little heed of what might be in the way, I still read on and on, waiting for it to touch ground, as it were; to plant its standing on reality. It left me with the feeling, that its theological ideal was simply suspended in the luminous atmosphere, which filled the writer's own consciousness. My judgment was, and is, that the doctrine espoused by Mr. Parker is a theosophy, rather than a scientific conclusion deduced from facts. It is a captivating and beautiful theory, the bare

enunciation of which is in itself a good; a gleam of religious poetry, bright and pure. But with all this, there is an impatience, not to say contempt, running through it, of much that man has gained in the slow approach to a science of God; a fitful disregard for the transcendent merits of the Christian Church; and even, by times, though this is not its habitual or its truest note, a heedlessness of the unapproached excellency of Christ; features which impress an impartial reader with the conviction that to start from God, and endeavour to reason down from Him, is really to stake all on the chance of blind instinct and private intuition. In the master himself the dangers of this method are only too apparent. In some whom we may almost consider his parasites, the sentence of the Psalter receives a new appropriation: *Quoniam non cognovi litteraturam, introibo in potentias domini.*

Doubtless, neither type of Unitarian thought, as presented by what are for the moment its central names, can be regarded as other than ephemeral in its actual results. A literal Channingism can no more be expected to live till the Millennium than a passionate Parkerism. And both types have enriched our religious life with conceptions of human and of divine truth which can never die. If we are to go back for the names we delight to honour, we might perhaps with advantage go further back. If we are to devote the slender resources of our publishing establishment to resuscitating denominational antiquities, there are antiquarian strata more classical and not less rich than any we have yet reached. The study and interpretation of Servetus have passed out of Unitarian hands. Do we want to know what he held and taught? We must consult a Lutheran pastor. The idealism of Socinus, the history of his statesmanlike adjustment of conflicting principles, lie buried among our forgotten glories. Yet the *Christianismi Restitutio*, and those first folios of the Polish Brethren, so long as European literature lasts, will invite and will reward the curiosity and the pains of the historians of human thought, and the students of Christian religion.

Confining ourselves to the types of Unitarianism still in

vogue, I am bound in honesty to register my conviction that the leading principle of the Channing type of Unitarianism —to speak so of that which centres in Man—is the one which has promise of the future.

(9) Unitarianism is the only religion, claiming to take new ground, that has ever started on its career without a present Revelation. It has revered in varying degrees the Revelations of the past; but has had nothing of its own to place side by side with them. Nor does this peculiarity depend at all directly upon its abnormal character. Muhammad was among apostates, and George Fox among schismatists, and Swedenborg among heretics, and Jakob Boehme among mystics, and Lord Herbert of Cherbury among Deists. Yet each of these based his presentation of truth on the distinct persuasion of an immediate divine communication. Unitarianism has never pretended to anything of the sort. It has no business with a theosophy; for it cannot say, as the true theosopher says, 'On such a day, in such a place, under such conditions, there came to me the direct voice or vision from God, which now I declare unto you.' It must work its way as a science; and, like all sciences, from the experimental, that is, in this case, from the human ground. I believe it will yet revolutionise the ideas of men about God, about Man, about salvation, about futurity. But it will hardly do this by brilliant dashes of beautiful theory. What the world requires, is a reverent, a religious, an open-eyed, a liberally instructed, a patient, painstaking, slowly maturing doctrine of God, truly scientific in its character, which shall answer to the old theology as the modern astronomy answers to the old astrology; a doctrine for which, to follow analogy, the true name might be found in the word theonomy.

Is this possible; and on the human ground? Assuredly so; though not possible to-day. In Nature and in Revelation no fact accosts a contemplative mind with more solemn wonder or more religious awe, than that of the sovran patience of God, unhasting, unresting; moving ever, but ever slowly moving; making worlds, but not making them in a moment; peopling worlds, that is, filling them gradually,

and as it were through the agency of progressive and continuous efforts; enlightening worlds, yet not by kindling the intelligence of mankind with a sudden blaze of illumination, but rather by steady and repeated strokes of intellectual and spiritual discipline, bringing fire out of the iron heart of nations. Strongly contrasted with this, is the totally different genius of the human spirit, whose ideal springs boldly into shape; whose best work is briefly done; whose energy, after a finished labour, pauses upon success, and insists on a period of repose. The contrast is deeper than a contradiction; and may be so read as to elucidate the mystery on the track of which we are pressing. Man, then, is the exponent of the ideas of God. It is in Nature that God works towards, and gradually accomplishes His Design; it is in Man that He reveals it. Often it seems as though the human spirit were going too quick for the universe; thus man prophesies God's future plans. In poetry, in art, in devotional aspiration, the human spirit speaks, and tells what God and the world will do. This, says the seeing soul, is the meaning of nature; this, the promise of God. The soul is right; and wrong. In idea, right. God will, indeed, make perfect on the larger scale the noble vision of human thought. Yet He may not realise it after the fashion which the prophet thinks.

True, that every man is not a prophet, and cannot, even in idea, reveal what God is bent upon accomplishing. Yet it might be so, in no unreal sense. To every human soul, however narrow its range, and weak its guiding thought, there is a portion of God's infinite purpose given to unfold. There is the opportunity afforded of bringing out some yet hidden beauty or grace, which God intends shall one day gladden and strengthen the life of all things. To speak with clear voice in the name of God to the listening world; to speak, armed with cogent authority of the Spirit; this is the high and solemn trust of the rare and chosen exceptions to the race of man. Yet no pure and simple life, true to itself, true to its Maker, was ever lived on this earth, that was not a voice on God's behalf, however still and small; and that did not, in its sincere and humble way, declare a hope and

reveal a faith which might well be *the evidence of things unseen.*

And if all men may somehow prophesy, all prophets certainly are men. In the supernatural order, as in the natural, the wisdom of God is slowly dropped, and bit by bit, into the world of thought, through human souls. The written Word of God is that treasury of His authoritative utterance which makes vocal to us the unwritten whispers and breathings of His Love. People who begin now, for the first time, to read their Bible for themselves, with open eyes, complain in these days of the unequal and fragmentary character, not only of its history and science, but even of its ethics and theology; they are offended with its glaring and sinful humanity, and with its gradual presentation of divinity; they are frightened at its progress and its developments; and they ask, with the fear of 'orthodoxy' still in their hearts: Can this sluggish and broken and incomplete unfolding be the true Divine method of Revelation?

My friends, the creeds will give you an inflexible truth, rounded, statuesque, and humanly perfect; but for the Bible, vital organism not without mixture of elements, and gradual growth, as of the sapling into the oak, and the child into the man, constitutes its divine perfection. It is in Revelation as it is in Nature: God grows no tree and feeds no soul without time, without effort, without conquest of opposing forces. It is in the wide world as it was in the Hebrew Church. Listen to the true witness of Isaiah: *To whom* (say they), *will he teach knowledge; and whom will he make to understand instruction? Are we but weaned from the milk, taken from the breast, that he giveth us precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little? Truly with stammering lips and a strange tongue hath He spoken to this people: who hath said, This is rest, to give rest to the weary, and this is refreshing—but they would not hear.* Because God's voice reveals so little at a time, and has so small and so immediate a duty to propose, we turn away and will not listen.

Yet, in His highest dealing with the human spirit, worked He not even so? A word here and there, amid the homely duties

of Nazareth; a parable here and there, in the corn-field or by the well-side; a sacrifice here and there, to serve rude fishermen or lowly women who trusted him: these were the morsels of divine teaching given through Jesus to the world; these were the steadfast and immutable realities of thought and action and endurance, which burst at length, with overwhelming inspiration, into the Sermon on the Mount, and finally sank back into the bosom of God, in that hour of obedience even unto death, which glorifies the little hill of Calvary. The incarnation of the Son of God was the incarnation of a Soul; no more: no less. It was worthy of all the apparatus of supernatural wonders which heralded, which conditioned, which transfigured it. The purity of our Lord's conception, the virgin whiteness of his life, the flowing marvel of his power, the sublime attractiveness of his wisdom, the holy ease of his resurrection, the glory reached within the veil—all these wonders wait upon the perfect advent of a Soul. They sink, around its rising, into a pale accompaniment of its brightness, bleached and eclipsed by the majesty of its appearing; and the very angels worship behind their wings. *For unto which of the angels said* God *at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?* But when in Christ the Soul stood forth, in its strength and its simpleness, there rang through earth and through heaven the song that hath not yet ceased: *They all shall wax old, as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed; but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.*

In fine. Safe in this thought we may well rest; that our guesses, and our errors, and our ventures towards the Truth were all seen and provided for, even when Christianity came into being. If antisupernaturalism has now its little day among us, this also we shall pass through. Materialism, likewise, among us had its day; and is gone. *The wind hath passed over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof knoweth it no more. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth.* Christ came into this world, not to stay the action of the mind; not to foreclose the problems of the intellect; not to furnish

substitutes for thinking, even on points connected with God. He came to give men new data for these studies, and to teach them where to find and how to create yet further material. He came to show that a pure heart and a holy life are the first requisites of real divine knowledge; that doing the will of God is inseparable from rightly apprehending the doctrine of God. This is the true secret of Christian progress—to deepen in devotion, to heighten in duty; and so to find the cloud clearing, and the Eternal Presence shining through. As the wise poet has said: 'The Lord advances and yet advances. Always the shadow in front; always the reached Hand, bringing up the laggards.' AMEN.

THE

PERMANENT AND TRANSIENT IN RELIGION.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE

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AT THE

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Protestantism, with exceptions here and there, tries a combination of authority and freedom. It can neither hand itself over to the Vatican, nor trust to liberty with complete abandonment. In consequence of this half-heartedness, it is losing ground wherever it insists at the same time on necessary dogmatic conclusions, and on the right of private judgment. Roman Catholicism proves unanswerably the need of a living infallible guide to tell us what we are to believe, if our salvation is determined by what we believe; and the clergy and laity who undergo conversion or perversion are logically consistent and straightforward. In Italy and Spain, when men leave Rome, there are no charms for them in Protestantism. They either become Theists, or travellers in quest of a religion. And it is the same in France. Voltaire, not Luther, is in the ascendant. And the Liberal section of the French Protestant church has long since abandoned the theology of the Huguenots.

However, there is a growing number of persons who maintain that the alternatives are not Rome or nothing, and who are persuaded that a sound foundation for theology may be laid in human nature and history. Here the permanent and transient are mingled. I propose an attempt at disentanglement. Religion as feeling becomes theology as an intellectual expression, and formulates itself in ideas. The three fundamental ideas are God, Communion between God and man, and Immortality. Truly enough, they are all metaphysical; but, to adopt the happy distinction

drawn by Mr. G. H. Lewes, they are not metempirical. We are as sure of God, despise Him how we may, and of communion between Him and us, as we are of an objective world and the response of other hearts to our affection. Even immortality, strictly speaking, is not metempirical, although it waits for verification. Really, life is all we know, and it is death that transcends, and always must transcend, in each man's own case, the limits of all possible experience. If we ever know that we are dead, we must be living to know it. "Religion, common sense, and science," says Mr. Lewes, "are the three great agents of civilisation." But I suppose that he and others who talk in the same way would treat all religious ideas as transient forms. I intend to try and show their permanence, and to state them, if I can, so as to win a rational acceptance for them.

These three are the germinal ideas, and all the rest are offshoots. God stands for diversified speculations, and includes Polytheism, Pantheism, Monotheism, Fetishism, and lower phases, if there be any. Communion with God interprets inspiration and revelation, incarnations and miracles. Immortality is the source of legendary resurrections and pictures of heaven and hell. That the ideas have passed through, and still largely survive in forms which the better mind of man has outgrown, I grant. It is natural that such should be the case. We expect to find primitive religion dressed in rude attire, and we are not disappointed. But the gar-

ments of primitive science are equally ragged and unfit for modern wear. And the common sense of the tenth century would be counted stupid now, for it was utterly unscientific. Progress through change, development through dissolution, has been the law everywhere, and the educational method of Providence. The seeming vagaries of the religious sentiment over which some make merry, and which others deem the consequences of a primeval fall, are processes of growth, and have all assisted an upward movement. They have been heroic, if vain attempts to master the meaning of the alphabet of God. I should no more think of doubting the divine soul which animated the men of early religion because of their blundering theological spelling, than I should think of calling the study of physical science a wasted enterprise because the sight of the Mediterranean led Thales to a theory of water as the first element of things, and because astronomy started with astrology, and chemistry with alchemy. In both cases maturity has corrected the errors of childhood.

A brave curiosity has endeavoured to discover the origin of religion, and to trace its earliest history. In the last century, when suddenly emancipated minds were perplexed by faiths they could not believe, and yet were called on to explain, they took easy refuge in fathering religion on the invention of an interested sacerdotal class. They forgot that this convenient theory did not account for the capacity of men to entertain religious ideas.

No thinkers of eminence now countenance their hasty generalizations of universal history from the facts of priestly imposture with which they were too familiar in that age. We are religious for the same reason that we are artistic and scientific, and live in societies, and form political governments. The germs are in us. Our wants create the priest, and religion flourishes wild and free in the soil of humanity long before he systematizes it, and he cultivates nothing which has not first seen the daylight in us. The original fitness of man to be religious, that is, the naturalness of religion, is now nearly everywhere recognized. The priestly invention hypothesis proposed to make bricks without straw.

When we have arrived at the primeval fitness of man to be religious, we have found religion in the constitution of things; we have traced its invention to the creating and shaping energy of God Himself, and henceforth we are concerned with history and the rational drift of ideas. But the earliest form of religious ideas, and what first waked them into activity, we cannot tell with certainty. These are prehistoric inquiries, and more or less probable guesses are the best solution we can attain to. When we make acquaintance with religion in history and literature, and in monuments of its living power, it has left the protoplasmic cell behind, and appears before us a fully developed spiritual organism. When the Roman legions landed in Britain, they found an ecclesiastical system and a faith already there. The oldest facts we can be sure about in

Egypt and Palestine are religious. Religion meets us in the Homeric poems, and the most ancient traditions of the Greeks. And it was present with the Aryan races before they left their Indian home and scattered themselves over the face of the earth —the civilizing children of the Most High. How did we shape our ideas at starting, and what prompted us to shape them at all? Was it fear or admiration that fashioned the conception of God? Did man project himself on a vaster scale to image his Creator, or did he behold God by an intellectual intuition which the marvels of the universe only served to excite? Did dreaming beget the idea of a soul and a life apart from the body, or did God make the suggestion, and the oracle was accepted as authoritative and divine as soon as we grew conscious of resistance to death and of a longing for endless life? Who can say?

These inquiries have more speculative interest than practical importance in them. It is the religious ideas in their maturity—it is men as they are now, the heirs of all the ages, and in the foremost files of time, with which we have to deal. We are the goal whither our ancestors tended, and explain their gropings by our light. We may have been formed directly from the dust, or by the infusion of an extra degree of the breath of God into previously existing organisms. Neither theory affects us much, for by what we are, and not by what we have come from, we judge ourselves and guess our future. We at any rate are men, and may fairly

decline to be measured either by dust or by monkeys. What we are fit for, what our duties are, and what aspirations we may legitimately indulge in, it belongs to the highest style of men to determine. Nor can we agree to let the present value of our religious ideas be settled by what they were five or ten thousand years since, or by what they are among existing savage races, or by what they may have been soon after hairy animals, inhabiting a tropical climate and possessing long ears and tails, first felt semi-human yearnings throbbing in their wild hearts. As well throw society back to the stage of fishers and hunters, and return to caves in the rocks for our dwellings, and begin afresh the struggle for existence with beasts of prey. If we are to estimate religion at its best, as we estimate poetry, art, and science, let us look at it in its representative men.

> "For I count the gray barbarian lower than the Christian child."

We are open, then, to admit any sort of origin for religion, and yet abate no jot of our claims in its favour. For my part, I see no sufficient cause for the historical results except some contact between God and the spirit of man, when man is quickened with new life and beholds eternal verities. Inspiration and revelation, broadly interpreted, are to me the open sesame. But wherever anthropology and comparative mythology and the embodiments of early thought in language may direct us to search

for the roots of our religious tree of life, we are most concerned with the part above ground, flourishing in the daylight. Through many autumns the fruit we gather now has been ripening. The crops of Eden were inferior to the crops of "this spot of earth set in the silver sea." And if we cannot go to the beginning, we can still go far enough back to find a pregnant history, and to justify us in foretelling future blossomings from present promises.

English religion, the consideration of which is our main business, runs its ancestral line back into Palestine. Our modern faith, call it Christian, call it Theistic, or call it what you will, is historically of Hebrew birth, and in all its transmigrations it has preserved the impress of its ancient home. It was enriched by Hebrew poets and prophets. It incorporated the culture of Egypt and Phœnicia, of Babylon, Persia, and Greece. In Christ it was born again from above. I mean that a fresh and healthier life reanimated it. Since then it has been a wandering pilgrim, and an unresting, if sometimes an unwilling pupil. It has sojourned in imperial courts and in deserts. It has borrowed both pomp and asceticism from its residence there, and has cast them off as it proceeded on its career, though not without inheriting tendencies against whose evil domination it has still to maintain a stout struggle. For not yet has it quite won back the freedom with which Christ sent it forth anew, and by means of which it gained its earliest and greatest victories. Not yet is it emancipated from survivals of monkery and Puritanism, and thoroughly

redelivered into the faith which knows nature as the garment of God, and humanity as the temple of the Holy Ghost. Not yet has it got rid of its early intolerance; born of ignorance that aped infallibility, it looks askance on science, and it dreads lest free inquiry should drive it into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, with no ministering angels to come to its succour. Its life would be the longest chapter in Austin Caxton's "History of Human Error"; only the life of physical science could compare with it, either for blunders or victories. It has mingled with Pagans and fairly converted them, and been partly converted by them: relics of Druidism and Odinism survive in English Christianity. It prided itself for ages on the outward Catholicity of Rome, and during four centuries Protestantism has yearned and fought in vain for a Catholicity inward and of the Spirit. It has set up standards of belief which it has been compelled to explain away, and proclaimed dogmas concerning God which its better genius would not let govern the practice of men, and had visions of another world which made the possession of this a calamity if the other were really to follow. But three ideas, some sort of faith in God, some sort of belief in Communion between God and man, and some sort of a doctrine concerning Immortality, have always been present potentially or actually; and they now demand to have their meaning re-interpreted in harmony with modern thought.

I will not attempt to prove that they are true.

That would be superfluous. Besides, the ordinary methods of proof do not apply to them except by way of illustration. According to the rules of Mr. Mill's logic, we can arrive at a probability in their favour, and no more. The real strength of the evidence on which belief in them rests lies in the logic of the moral sentiment: once accepted, they shine by their own light. They prove their right to rule us by the invigorating force they impart. Without them, life is poverty-stricken, and loses sublimity. It does not necessarily become a pettifogging and huckstering affair. For there is a noble buoyancy in human nature which keeps our heads above the waters, except we determine to sink. I will state how I think these ideas may now be held, remembering the changeful history they have gone through, with my eyes open to doubts and difficulties which I have no desire to blink, and, above all, bearing in mind that in their totality they transcend me, but still feeling they are necessary postulates in some fashion or other.

1. God. The universe is the child of Intelligence and Will, and everywhere is alive with thought and conscious purpose. The distinction between the natural and supernatural disappears in the immanence of God in nature. All natural phenomena are the activity of God, and what we call the supernatural has been got at by first banishing Him as an abiding presence, and then bringing Him back in sudden and partial irruptions. But, according to the apostolic saying, "Out

of Him, through Him, and to Him are all things." As for His attributes they are numberless. Yet imagination cannot travel beyond the power, wisdom, and goodness that He must have as the source of the power, wisdom, and goodness there are in us, and have been in all men before us. If we say He is all-powerful, all-wise, and all-good, it is because we must give Him all good names. But they exhaust Him not, and define Him not. We throw them out as hints of the unspeakable perfection which He is. Directly or by deputy He possesses all and uses all, for He contains all. He is the Unity comprising infinite multiplicity of being, and in Him we live and move and have *our* being. With His brightness the stars shine; with His beauty the earth is fair; with His energy humanity may be divine. He marshals the heavenly hosts, and their courses are the rhythmic movements of His intellect. The sweep of history is an episode of His biography. His purposes are always being fulfilled: matter and spirit combine to fulfil them. Matter is God visible, spirit is God invisible; and in the invisible there are resources beyond what appear. By means of them men have overleapt the limits of their age, and they warrant belief in continued evolution to which no finis will come; for He is an ever-flowing fountain, and a self-feeding and ever-burning fire of creative energy. Truly sang the Earth Spirit in "Faust"—

> "'Tis thus at the loom of time I ply,
> And weave the life-garment of Deity;"

And truly the Persian poet—

> "Over space the clear banner of mind is unfurled,
> And the habits of God are the laws of the world;"

And truly the Hebrew prophet—

> "They that wait on the Eternal shall renew their strength."

Our words about him are metaphors, and necessity makes us more or less anthropomorphic. Both Biblical and philosophical language, however, at times, run into Pantheism, and so does poetry. But consciousness brings us back from Pantheism to Theism. The Self-existent and Independent One is not we, and we are not He. So to speak, He loans himself out in fragments to His dependent creatures, who are sustained because He breathes into them the breath of His own life. He is personal, for infinite intelligence and will can be not otherwise conceived, and the laws of human thought compel us to represent all degrees of intelligence and will as personal. But those who are surest of Him and nearest to Him feel silence may be golden and speech silvern. Professor Huxley's worship of the silent sort may be quite genuine worship—

> "Come then, expressive Silence, muse His praise."

2. Communion between God and man. This is implied in the demon of Socrates, and in Christ's companionship with the Father, and the raptures of Fenelon and Madame Guyon, and the experiences of many faithful souls. Affirm the infinitude and, therefore, the all-inclusiveness of God, as, both in

religion and logic, following Spinoza, we needs must, there still is a personal reality, a quasi-independence of our own, which we cannot doubt. Consciousness presents two factors as its contents, ourselves and the not-ourselves. The not-ourselves, which makes for righteousness, and with which we commune in worship and on Mounts of Transfiguration, is God. We speak with our fellow-men, and as our souls mingle we each grow stronger. We look beneath the shows of nature; her secret life passes into ours; we thrill with the power that pulsates in the stars and shimmers and murmurs in the mountain brook, and we are wrapped as Wordsworth was into a "still communion which transcends the imperfect offices of prayer and praise." These are indications, in a lower phase, of what in a higher phase is communion with God. It is communion with God intellectually, when a truth so flashes upon us that we feel its absoluteness and its universality. Then, no longer the bond-slaves of opinion, we are face to face with the reason, the Logos of God, the true light that enlighteneth every man coming into the world. We see Him as He is, though we may, and indeed we are sure to inadequately interpret what we see. Do we not inadequately interpret the relationships of any atom of matter? It is communion with God morally, when our consciences are quickened by a power standing over against us and speaking with authority; a power which gives us true freedom when we loyally serve it,

imparts a meaning to duty, constitutes us responsible beings, and enables us to taste the joy of self-devotion; a power which creates heaven when we work in harmony with it, and creates hell when we wander in perverse ways of our own without it as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Said Kant, "Two things there are which, the oftener and the more steadfastly we consider, fill the mind with an ever-new, an ever-rising admiration and reverence — *the* STARRY HEAVEN *above*, *the* MORAL LAW *within*." And the moral law is God animating and transcending the human conscience. It is one aspect of what the Hebrew prophets, as interpreted by Mr. Matthew Arnold, called the Eternal that makes for righteousness. Finally, it is communion with God spiritually, when, not consciously engaged in intellectual activity and not consciously there and then concerned with practical duty, we lie still, and an atmosphere of love and trust that casts out fear embraces us, and a vision of excellence and beauty is revealed, and we are in a state of ecstacy, and nowhere alone, because in Christ's words the Father is with us. This is religious rapture, and the crown of possible delights. Shelley describes it in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty." It alone answers to Goethe's line—

"Rapture so deep, its ecstacy is pain."

I know we have no right to break up the unity of man into intellectual, moral, and spiritual faculties, when there is only man diversely manifesting

himself. But the division has conveniences that excuse it. We mean that in these three ways man ascends and God descends. A strength, a bliss, a sunshine not our own to start with, become our own. Universal truth, absolute righteousness, and spiritual perfection visit us when we are flooded by the boundless life and grace of the dayspring from on high. The communion is latent in every soul; and where it is realized it is the apotheosis of man and the incarnation of God.

3. Immortality. The idea of God causes this as a necessary consequence, and it is reaffirmed in the experience of divine communion. Intellectual activity feels its own undying nature; the unknown we pant to master is, in its boundlessness, a warrant of the sureness of our eternal quest for knowledge. There is no abiding satisfaction to the conscience in our greatest moral achievements. They have all a prophetic outlook, their horizon extends as we journey, and they require that the temporary servants of virtue shall be its everlasting servants. Our spiritual instincts respond to the precept of the Founder of Christianity, "Be ye therefore perfect, as your Father in heaven is perfect," and that is an invitation to endless progress; and, after all, death is a mere synonym for ignorance. It tells nobody anything beyond the dissolution of the material organism. Now and then, yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow, are phases of the immortality already begun, and which is the human side of God's eternity. When we try to look behind the veil, it

is true that we see nothing clearly. There shadows, clouds, and darkness rest. But of this I am persuaded, and the persuasion is my exceeding joy—the moral constitution of humanity abides the same; the same laws are in operation, and effects are for ever implicit in causes. In endless duration conduct must leave imperishable traces in me. The remembrance of what we have been and done accompanies us, and though it sleep awhile, kindred experiences reawake it. Hope lives, latent powers are kindled into action. The light that cometh from God never goes out, but shines more and more unto the perfect day. We may not say that here or there will be our home, and that this or that will be our life. It is enough to say, that in the light of immortality—

> "All experience is an arch, wherethrough
> Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever as we move."

I have here studiously avoided any parade of argument, and have contented myself with stating the three fundamental religious ideas as many people now hold them. Such argumentative force as the statement so far has consists in its general fitness to satisfy the felt wants of men.

Objections, however, are raised from various sides. I have taken religion as a permanent reality; whereas Positivists insist that, while religion is permanent, this is a theological version which will die like its predecessors. I have been sure con-

cerning things which Agnosticism maintains cannot be known at all, and maintains, further, that these ideas, indeterminate as I have left them, transcend the limits of reason quite as much as the high-flying systems I have ignored. From the popular side, it may be objected that I have failed to give due expression to other spiritual facts which are needful to exhibit the full force of the chosen three. And from the secular standpoint, it may be said that they are all mere unproductive notions (whereas we want life), and that they refer us to a heavenly Utopia, while we desire equity and happiness on this bank and shoal of time, about whose reality there can be no possible mistake. Now, if we could not meet these objections, religion would have a gloomy look-out, so far as its ideas go. Comte diffused throughout humanity, might smile, unconsciously, of course, but seeming joyous, as leaves kissed by the breeze; and Dean Mansel's bones, waiting the resurrection, might rattle gleefully in their grave. But, I think, they can be met.

Is religion, in the sense of Theism, a dying cause? Has it served its time, and have we now only to bid it a courteous good night? The history certainly does not point to death, nor are present signs at all significant of death. It has been a beneficent agent in successive stages of development, and the strongest force amid co-operant forces. Priests figure prominently among early civilizers, and also among early scientists and philosophers. No doubt, they have had their faults. They have wished to stereotype temporary

forms, and have set their faces against change. That is to say, they have been conservative, like politicians and the mass of mankind, and, for that matter, like the older-fashioned men of science. But, as the facts they deal with, according to the hypothesis, belonged to infinitude and eternity, in the nature of things stationariness was impossible. The Spirit of God built up new systems out of ruined systems. The potential unity which underlies religion in its primitive phases, and reaches clear expression in Theism, introduced order into the sciences, and made them mutually balanced parts of one universe of thought. In architecture, religion built the finest edifices. Stonehenge, the Pyramids, the templed Arcopagus, and the Gothic cathedrals of Christendom, witness to its ancient and undying might. Art turned to religion for ideals, and soared into the upper spaces, because it panted after God. The Italian painters served an apprenticeship to piety. From Giotto to Michael Angelo and Raphael, they were charmed by the invisible beauty of God, and gave shape to it in Christs, Madonnas, and Saints, which we worship afar off. Philosophy has always felt impelled to seek a scientific theology. Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel may all be unsatisfactory, but their religious passion is their strength. They get universal aims from it, and hedges and walls disappear. Religion is the breath of life to poetry. Its spiritual oxygen refreshed David and Isaiah, and purified the troubled atmosphere of the writer of Job. Its legends were the

inspiration of Dante and Milton; it is the informing soul of Spenser's allegory, and the root of Shakspere's humanness. Its fire burns in modern poetry, just in the degree in which the flame of genius shoots skyward, and merges in the boundless, and so saves life and inspiration from poverty. It illuminated the intellect of Goethe, and the romance of Schiller, and the nature-worship of Wordsworth. It was present, half-creative and half-iconoclastic, in Byron and Shelley. Voltaire clung to it while making destructive onslaughts on Catholicism. Its baptismal efficacy endows Tennyson and Browning with perennial youth. If these be signs of approaching death, where shall we look for life? We know the marks of systems fated to perish quickly, and we do not find them in religion. Its pulse is strong, its step is firm, its eye is bright, its voice rings cheerfully.

In an eloquent passage, whose melancholy tone bore confutation along with it, Professor Clifford wrote, "The Great Companion is dead." All he knew was that *he* had lost sight of the Great Companion. History, science, art, poetry, aspiration, and the worshippers who "kneel upon the world's great altar stairs that slope through darkness up to God," say nay. And Professor Clifford himself, in his devotion to truth, and his readiness to die rather than lie, and in the sanctity he feels in "ought," as well as in the sustenance for his spiritual emotions he seeks in Canon Kingsley and Dr. Martineau, joins in confessing that the Great Companion lives.

If there be truth in the doctrine of evolution, and if it mean the ever-multiplying richness of human life, and the ever-widening sphere of human possibilities, and particularly if we interpret evolution as devolution, then religion will accompany us whithersoever we go—inseparable from us, as intellect and the moral sense are inseparable. We shall keep God—the ideal excellence; and Communion with God—strengthening weak hands and confirming feeble knees; and Immortality—the privilege of incessant enterprise and labour; and though we may alter our language and transform our definitions, the significance of the reality will continue substantially the same. God will be the name for the true and beautiful and good beyond us, and always asking us to come up higher. And this, surely, is a better interpretation of the progressive movement of the times than any given by Positivism, which, in spite of its protests to the contrary, turns religion, as men will understand it, out of doors, into the cold.

Comte is about equal in dogmatism to a Pope; and Mr. Frederic Harrison amounts to rather more than a Cardinal, perhaps he is on a level with a General of the Jesuits. Prophesying with a bravado that leaves expounders of the Apocalypse and Daniel nowhere, they say we shall content ourselves with the totality of being, and be no more troubled with inquiries after a presiding Intelligence and Will; and look onward to a misty prospect of unconscious life in humanity, while for our personal soul, if we have one, the grave will retain its sting and death

its victory. Such a catastrophe, judging from what has gone before, is improbable in the extreme. It would be the negation both of God and immortality. Yet, should it overshadow us, it would only be a temporary eclipse of the sun that never sets; and religion, as ideas as well as emotions, would again emerge. The link of history which lights us to God behind also lights us on to Him before. By it Positivists see that He has been, and we see that He is and will be. I recall the language of Gray's Bard—

> "Fond, impious man, think'st thou yon sanguine cloud
> Raised by thy breath has quenched the orb of day?
> To-morrow he renews the golden flood,
> And glads the nations with redoubled ray."

If I may prophesy in turn, I think that the moral earnestness of modern Positivists will welcome the new morning. The principle, Love; the basis, Order; the end, Progress; propounded by the Religion of Humanity, are best secured when humanity feels kinship to God, and God recreates us after the powers of an endless life.

Positivism is contemptuous at the bare mention of a scientific theology, or theology of any kind; and we have to fight for our life, and the very permission to speak, with it. The objection of Agnosticism to minutely detailed dogmas is more reasonable. This is another thing altogether to repudiating religion, or writing the epitaph of the fundamental ideas it uses as the intellectual ex-

pression of emotion. And religion also rejects the over precise definitions of dogmatic theologians. When most intense, living, and rich, it loves the open air, and disdains to be "cabin'd, cribb'd, and confined." Men have constructed all-inclusive systems. They have applied analysis and synthesis to the nature of God, and have fancied themselves far-sighted enough to make ordnance surveys of heaven and hell. But never in their pre-eminently religious moods. Religion, reverent and dazzled by excess of light, and therefore modest, scored no victory at the Council of Nicæa, or when some unknown metaphysician excogitated the Athanasian Creed. Its victories were the humanizing and Christianizing of the Roman empire and the northern barbarians. The alphabet Ulphilas gave the Goths reckons for more than his Arianism. The Thirty-nine Articles and the Westminster Confession are of small importance in illustrating the healthy religious life of England or Scotland. We turn rather to Hooker and Herbert, to Milton and Baxter, and the hard-working parish clergy, and to the Covenanters, faithful to conscience, on the Scottish mountains, and there finding God again in the world from which their theology had as good as banished Him. We agree with Agnosticism that the natural limitation of reason is a sound reply to both lay and clerical Know-alls. After Dante had descended through the awful glooms of the Inferno, and painfully climbed the Mountain of Purgatory, and from the summit been borne to Paradise, he met with

schoolmen, saints, and apostles, and settled many knotty questions with them to the satisfaction of all parties concerned. But once beholding the symbolic mystery of the White Rose of God, thenceforward speech failed him, and the experience remained like a sweet memory of the Sybil's music.

In the interests of religion itself, we impose silence on the bewildering babblement of articles and confessions when they prate too glibly. Still, if we do not know all, neither are we ignorant of all. For side by side with the inevitable, partial ignorance of which Agnostics properly remind us, there exists a large measure of knowledge. The historical facts already mentioned must be interpreted without being explained away, and so must the present facts of consciousness. Science is both physical and metaphysical, and except it furnish some rationale of religious ideas which will maintain them fairly intact, it must be judged one-sided.

Say what we will, infinitude and eternity are always forced upon us. Infinitude is present in each point of space, and eternity in each moment of time. We mark out boundaries of sensation and thought in a whole we know to be boundless. No matter where and how we begin, that is where and what we end in. We feel, too, that we are mocked if attempts are made to put us off with negative notions of indefinite extent and succession, when we have an affirmative internal deliverance of infinitude and eternity. For we are not simply ignorant of limits, we know the absence of limits.

To this extent Gnosticism and not Agnosticism is true science, in the larger sense which includes metaphysics, and in including metaphysics includes religion and theology. Nor does it meet the case to call these ideas purely subjective. They tell us the contrary themselves, and refuse any classification which denies their objective solidity, and swears away their character as honest witnesses. Our necessary belief in infinitude and eternity is our rudimentary consciousness of God—the Infinite and Eternal One. We deal with the historical forms of this consciousness, accepting the naturalness of religion as a starting point. We compare the varied growths, we consider the modifications they have undergone, by a deeper understanding of physical phenomena and the intercourse of races. From God we come down to fragmentary representations of them in the human mind, and from them we reascend to God. God presents Himself to us—that is the objective side; we represent God—that is the subjective side. And the science of religion, or theology, is the history, the classification, and the interpretation of these objective presentations and subjective representations. It is incomplete, I know, like every other science. As yet it is only in infancy, according to the general law that the highest organisms have the slowest development. Evidently, however, thorough-going Agnosticism says *ignoramus* too soon. But, perhaps, theological assumptions of omniscience have partly provoked the opposite confession of mental imbecility.

We must beware lest we thrust religion into uncongenial spheres, where she has no business to be, and does not feel herself at home. The life of God in man and of man in God, both testified to by spiritual experience, neither explain the facts of physical nature nor can be explained by them. So we leave physical scientists supreme in their own realm. It belongs to them to tell us, if they can, by what processes the present state of the world came about, and we do not want to shut their mouths by Genesis or any other tradition. Their function is to trace law everywhere, and we are unwise if we put in pleas for miracles, either in the case of Christianity or any other faith. They may point out, if they can, how life is one continuous line, and we have no right to ask for a special divine fiat in our creation. But to all they teach we can add, speaking from other sources of information—let the method have been what it may, still the heavens declare the glory of God; let the unbroken regularity of physical antecedents be granted, still the laws of nature are the steady working of God's intelligence and will; let cousinship, however close, be established between us and the lower animals, still the idea of moral perfection, the power of language and the capacity for worship, the prerogatives of humanity, stamp us with superior dignity, and are a revelation of God to our souls.

Physical science has no concern with this addition, having no eyes to see and no tongue to speak. But an all-round science is metaphysical as well as

physical. The boundaries of their respective worlds are plainly drawn. Mental facts are on one side, and material facts on the other. Masters in both, but whose sympathies are more with physics than metaphysics, *e.g.*, Professors Tyndall and Huxley, admit that no known and no conceivable molecular motion can be made to yield the facts of consciousness. A great gulf divides them. Physical science may deny the resurrection of the body: with that denial metaphysical science has nothing to do. On the other hand, metaphysical science may assert the immortality of the soul: and with that assertion physical science has nothing to do. There is a flavour of common sense in the proverb "let the cobbler stick to his last," and both physical and metaphysical scientists may take it to heart.

The new coinage of Agnosticism is an immense improvement on the base metal formerly issued from the atheistic mint. Atheism, or downright denial that God exists, has no philosophical spokesman now-a-days. Not proven, not understood, not knowable, is the Agnostic utterance. And Agnostics, too, are mostly religious in their way. Mr. Herbert Spencer proposes to reconcile religion and science; he will give up neither. Professor Tyndall has page upon page glowing with the fervour of religious feeling. Even Comte, though not with any theological bias, repudiates the superstition of atheism, and writes catechisms, and establishes saints' days, and constitutes a religious priesthood of humanity. Their drawback is the confusion of the

partly unknown with the totally unknown, and then again the confusion of the unknown with the unknowable; and they forget that calling a thing unknowable presumes some knowledge of it already.

They are Agnostics on immortality. Well, so are we all. In strictness, knowledge is confined to our immediate consciousness here and now, and belief answers for the past and the future. Memory is belief in the past, and hope is belief in the future. All men believe by reason, and by faith, which is the sublimation, and not the contradiction of reason, in to-morrow. Religionists further believe, by virtue of the same reason and faith, in an endless series of to-morrows. But we are all Agnostics both on to-morrow and on immortality, and the chief difference between us is whether or not we can trust the larger hope. Agnostics tell us they do not and cannot know God as a person. Here the chasm is wider, though not so much in knowledge as in belief. The word person has been needlessly hampered in its meaning by narrow human limitations. The popular theology has loved to fashion God in the shape of man. It has ceased to paint pictures of Him, as it once did; but it is still open to many of Mr. Matthew Arnold's criticisms. Personality has been supposed to imply finiteness and form; and as we cannot ascribe them to God, and suppose Him susceptible to the photographic apparatus, His personality, thus conceived, is denied. Is not this the source of most of the confusion, if not all? Let us say—God is the Sovereign Reason, the Sovereign

Love, and the Sovereign Righteousness: these constitute His personality, and personality means—God knows what He is doing. We say He, and not It; for a neuter pronoun gives up the whole case, and implies something below us, which the God-idea will not allow. We add, "These are only a portion of His ways but the thunder of His power who can understand?"

I am not so vain as to think this explanation will heal the breach between Theists and Agnostics. Intellectually we shall probably long continue to stand on different sides and fail to appreciate one another's language. Agnostics may still go on interpreting the facts of consciousness so as to clip our wings, and shut us up in subjective cages. There the proceedings of us eagles and skylarks can be kept within bounds; whereas in our native heavens we are prone to get near the sun, and to rain down music from invisible worlds. But the worst they can allege against us is that we think more highly of our capacities than we ought to think, and are not ready enough to admit "impossible" into our vocabulary. Our sole crime is being on the side of the angels. They have an intellectual, but not a moral quarrel with us; they would be glad if we and they could wake and find our dreams true. They would rejoice if they could conquer their sensitive keenness and pulse strength for the hard fight of righteousness by our communion with the Perfect and Altogether Lovely, and if they could believe they were serving an earthly apprenticeship

to a heavenly journeymanship of labour. For they all accept Carlyle's gospel of work. But their logic permits no leaps, and the senses seem to round off life with the grave. To our infinitely above and eternally beyond, they answer, It may be so: we do not know, and, meanwhile, we dare not say that we believe. That is Agnosticism. Its hesitations do not affect our own serene confidence: our faith is our strength, and with God our spirits are safe for ever.

But modern thought has a just moral as well as an intellectual quarrel with the popular theology. The popular theology's theory of God glories in mocking reason with contradictions, and it does not simply make faith a higher flight of reason. Its unique Bible sets at nought the sacred literature of the rest of the world, and so is inadmissible. Its miracles fly in the face of facts, and compel science to assume an antagonistic position. So much for the intellectual quarrel. The moral quarrel is worse. Its doctrine of the devil makes God the author of evil. Its doctrine of natural depravity makes sin a necessity. Its attempts to get rid of the consequences of natural depravity by the doctrine of a vicarious satisfaction shocks the conscience. And its doctrine of eternal and useless punishment breaks the heart. Between modern thought, which is the creation of the Spirit of God moving on the face of the waters of to-day, and the popular theology, which is a survival of the childhood of the world, there can be no truce concluded, no tomahawks can be buried, and no pipes of peace

can be smoked. War is their state of nature: and yet the popular theology has hold of the root of the matter, for it expresses the three great religious ideas, although inconsistently, and apparently with a desire to minimize their significance. So far as it is cheerfully affirmative we may accept it, and regret only its limitations. And, so far as science declares for history and nature, we may accept it too, and regret only the pretensions of physical science to talk with a metaphysical tongue.

If science, either physical science or metaphysical science, is to treat the religious ideas with respect and listen to them with an apt ear, they must be so stated as to permit the belief and authority of sound scientific principles to co-exist with them in the same mind. If the development of religious ideas and scientific principles are not simply on different planes, but clash, then we can expect no reconciliation between science and religion. Now, the very utmost that science can venture to say in reference to Theism is—it is above me: and that perversely dwarfs science. But, throughout the whole length and breadth of the popular theology, so far as it adds Middle Age orthodoxy on to Theism, science may fairly say it contradicts me: and the contradiction can only be got rid of in two ways. The popular theology must either die altogether, or it must allow a free, and what Mr. Matthew Arnold would call a literary interpretation of its language. Suppose we suggest such an interpretation, thus—

The whole truth we attempt to state in religious

Word is known to God alone, in whom all knowledge eternally dwells. What we say about religion is our account of the efforts God produces in us; and some failing short of the circle that bounds every human version of it. The assumption of complete knowledge on our part, either in the mind or in a book, is met by the history of change and progress; and by the vanishing eras we still turn to reconcile Moses to the clouds. The History veiled in tribal and national gods prepared the way for belief in one Omnipresent Spirit, crowned by Christianity as a Universal Father. Moreover, common to all religions as traditions are always to be interpreted as the dawning of a perception of the life of God immanent in nature. Spiritual inspirations, revelations, and sacred books are the witness borne to a living communion between God and man. Incarnations are a testimony that God builds His Holy of Holies in human souls. Resurrections are the creed we sing of our belief in immortality. Exclusive beliefs have perished and are perishing like exclusive individualism and nationalism; and now the era of universality and humanity, and a new advent of God are at the door. This throws away the killing letter and keeps the life-giving spirit, and plucks the flower safety out of the nettle danger. And to something like this the popular theology is coming. The process of transformation may be seen on all sides.

But when Theism, as historical and scientific grounds, has vindicated its right to live and rule;

when Agnosticism and Positivism are appeased, and the popular theology is transformed,—there will still remain the indifferent and alienated masses. Their attitude, and how to allure it, is the most difficult portion of the problem which religious teachers are bound to solve. These masses have not only to be persuaded to believe, they have to be induced even to care. They have been alienated, or rendered indifferent, partly by theological pretensions of omniscience easily seen through, partly by immoral, heartless, and cruel dogmas, and partly by the opposition between scientific facts and the Biblical records; partly also by social phenomena which fall below the demands of the enlightened conscience, and which comfortable religionists leave to be rectified in the sufferers in another world, while they preach pious resignation in this. The first three causes are approaching dissolution. The signs of the times are big with promise in that direction. The last we have not yet mastered, nor shall we master readily. I offer suggestions of what I think will turn out a happy method of presenting religion so as to win both intellectual and moral sympathy.

The religious ideas quicken healthy human emotions, they consecrate life and they warrant belief in the ultimate victory of labours for righteousness. God is on the side of equity, and the ideal dreams of the best men. And if the belief that we are working on the same lines of action which have been made glorious by heroes and heroines strengthens us, much more are we strengthened by the belief that

we are working on the same lines as God. If the consequences to-morrow of evil doing to-day warn us against sin, and the consequences of righteousness help to keep us its fast servants, much more will sin repel and righteousness draw when their consequences last not only for days and years, but for ever. The powers of the world to come enrich Utilitarianism with motives before which its calculations of pleasures and pains dwindle away into nothing. And more and better than that. Immortality is an impetus to endless hope. It confers fresh preciousness on the soul, and secures a harvest time for our seeds. It interprets the long discipline of humanity, and foretells the harmonious consummation of all in God. Now and then in the might of religious ideas men have gone forth to combat, and the memory of their deeds is our inspiration to seek a like renown. God was the guarantee of Mazzini's faith in progress. "A tyrant," he said, "was the first Atheist." Religion implies the reverent treatment of all men; and because they are the potential images of God, it guards their rights and braces them for their duties with a sacred zeal. Morality aims at the same end; but religion, among other things, is morality coloured by emotion, and lasts longer, and is stronger while it lasts. Apart from theological notions concerning Christ, the spirit of life in him would silence the din of war, and arbitrate between labour and capital, and make a family of helpful brethren. More practical Christianity means more justice, more joy, more of a life

worth living, and more also of the "golden exhalations of the dawn," and a return of young enthusiasm for the true, the beautiful, and the good.

In some aspects religion may be called cloudland, inaccessible, and without fixity of shape; yet not the less are its vague and distant ideals powerful for secular purposes. The material cloudland adds to the splendour of the skies, and creates all earthly fertility; and when the religious cloudland descends and mingles with the common affairs of life, it adorns whatever it touches. I cannot think that men would either be indifferent or alienated in the same numbers or in the same way as they are now, if we were to present religion to them fairly —a tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Hitherto we have too much put the cloudland afar off. We have said God is in heaven and man below, which is not the whole truth. Let rain fall and oases spring up; let God be felt after in human affection and duty; let us change our other-worldly tune for a tune suitable to this world and all worlds, and wanderers will return wondering why they kept out of Paradise so long. I do not say they will at once accept any theological system; and, certainly, no system such as the bulk of the churches offer will win back the secular working classes. But the generous and genial atmosphere of rational piety will captivate them unawares, and the mind will take to habits of thought in harmony with impulses whose warmth and quickening power the heart and conscience

have already felt. It may also be that the religious ideas which will finally be accepted can hardly be called Christian in any sense that would satisfy even latitudinarian bishops and deans. The most elastic interpretation of the Prayer Book might snap without embracing them. But at least they would be Theistic, and perhaps acceptable to "The Pilot of the Galilean lake." They would lend themselves to culture and Catholicity. They would reintroduce poetry and the ideal as sovereigns over the prose and matter-of-fact and bread-and-butter order of existence.

I have now finished this attempt at an interpretation of the three fundamental religious ideas —God, Communion between God and man, and Immortality, in their relation to modern thought. Their beginnings are unimportant, the germs were always there, and to this they have grown. More or less, they have been present in all great world-religions, and have formed characters of varied admirable types. Mr. John Stuart Mill concludes that the highest religious style of man these or other ideas have produced is Jesus Christ, and the best religion is Christianity as Christ taught it.

As religious teachers we have to meet science in friendly encounters, and offer a rational and spiritual supplement to the facts it delivers. We have to show that only God makes nature intelligible, and enables us to thread the labyrinth of history guided by a sure clue. And while we confess that there are heights and depths in God

that no human intellect or imagination can measure, we have to maintain, on the basis of our personal consciousness, that He and we are linked together, and that our intellect, our moral sense, and our will, are not the flowerings of matter, but have their origin and correspondences in Him. We have to assist the popular theology through the throes of a new birth, and persuade it to receive influxes of life from above. We have to welcome aid from literature, art, and philosophy, and in return to breathe the soul of religion into their soul. We have to apply religious ideas to life, and make them a creative social power. They possess the mightiest levers and the strongest motives; and their work is, while looking for the kingdom of God hereafter, to establish the kingdom of God here. And, finally, we have to keep the altar fires ever burning in our souls, and there worship, at the temple's inner shrine, Him from whom we come, and who is our daily Companion, and to whom we go.

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HAVE UNITARIANS

A

GOSPEL TO PREACH?

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION,

In Essex Street Chapel, London, June 4th, 1879.

By JOHN WRIGHT, B.A.

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,
37, NORFOLK STREET, STRAND, LONDON.

*** The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, in accordance with its First Rule, gives publicity to works calculated "to promote Unitarian Christianity by the diffusion of Biblical, theological, and literary knowledge, on topics connected with it," but does not hold itself responsible for every statement, opinion, or expression of the writers.

HAVE UNITARIANS A GOSPEL TO PREACH?

I. Cor. ix. 16.—"Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me if I preach not the Gospel."

THE feeling which the Apostle expresses in these words, is that experienced by every conscientious man who believes that he possesses religious truth and moral influence, such as are fitted to be the source of spiritual blessings to mankind. In proportion as he is assured that the belief and faith, which are precious to his own soul, and practically useful in his own life, have in them a power to raise and guide and comfort others, necessity is laid on him to spread them abroad. It is with him no matter of choice, no question of taste, but a bounden duty and a solemn responsibility. Alas for him, if he fail to perform the duty, if he prove himself a wicked and slothful servant, who hides the talent entrusted to him—if, under any pretence or taking shelter under any excuse, he refuses to let his light shine before men, and does *not* preach to them what he feels to be the Gospel.

The primary object of the Association which calls us together this day, is, if I rightly understand it, to join its members in a united effort to perform this work. It is not a society for the search after truth, the exercise of enquiry,

the investigation of historical evidence, or the elaboration of a system of theology. It is not designed to look to the interests of a number of united Christian congregations, to increase the power and extend the boundaries of any ecclesiastical organisation or formal church. Still less is it a union of men who have in view, by means of it, to accomplish any purposes of personal ambition, individual, social, or political. Its one only aim and purpose is simple, definite, and practical—namely, to preach the Gospel, to spread what *we* believe to be pure and vital religion, among the people. You will perhaps think that the word "religion" so used is vague, and therefore misleading, and will urge that it would be more exact to affirm that our object is to diffuse certain particular *doctrines*, as opposed to those held by the great mass of our fellow-Christians. It may be said, that the purpose of the Association should be described as being—to preach a definite theology—rather than generally to spread religion. The difference between the two statements is not a mere question of words. There is a marked and very important distinction involved in the enquiry, whether our object in this Association is practical or speculative, whether it aims at promoting Christian faith and works, or only a particular belief about religion,—whether in short its work is religious or only theological.

The presence of the word "Unitarian," in the title of the Association, indicates that it is a union of individuals who have a substantial agreement in the views they hold on the great leading questions of theology. Without any verbal creed, any formal definition of doctrines, the word denotes, in a manner universally understood, the opinions of the members, and as long as it remains in use, in connection with the Association, no one will become a member who

does not consider himself a Unitarian in theological opinion. While each puts his own interpretation on the term, as to its exact meaning, all concur in considering it to indicate the particular form of belief to be employed, in the activities engaged in by the Association for the promotion of religion and virtue. Having this general agreement, uniting on these broad lines, we can work together to make known our opinions, and to strive to gain their acceptance by our fellow-men.

But what is the motive that urges us to do this? A man may care so much for his theological opinions that he seeks to diffuse them for their own sake, just as he would seek to establish a scientific fact, or a philosophical truth; or he may value them principally as a means, and finding that they are the seed of good to himself, may urge others to adopt them, in order that they may profit by them as he has done. He may preach theology as the one result to be aimed at; or he may preach theology as an instrument for increasing religion. He can only speak of religion as it appears to his own mind, as he himself believes in it. But if it be the faith he values rather than the belief, the result more than the means, the devout trust and active love that spring from the doctrine, rather than the doctrine itself—in that case, his main object in his preaching will be to help his brethren to become RELIGIOUS; and he will lay stress on theology, only so far as his experience leads him to feel assured that it tends to the increase of religion. I contend that this is the position we here assume, that our one sole purpose is, to spread true religion among our fellow-creatures, and that we dwell on doctrinal differences and assert doctrinal conclusions, only so far as this is necessary, in order to carry on the important work, and effect the great purpose we have in view.

It is true that the peculiar position in which we are placed, a few heretics in the midst of an orthodox community, often compels us to speak plainly and pointedly on the differences of opinion that exist, to show why it is that we cannot accept popular creeds, and thus to assume an attitude of theological controversy. But if this necessity ever betrays us into love of controversy as such, into fondness for intellectual debating in forgetfulness of religious feeling, into the championship of mere opinion for its own sake—we are thereby false to our true work. Whenever our aim is negative, this must be only as a step towards broader and stronger affirmation; whenever our work is destructive, this must be only as a preparation for nobler reconstruction. I can appeal with confidence to the Books published and circulated by the Association, to the general tone of the Lectures delivered under its auspices, to the well-known, life-long spirit and conduct of its leading Members and active Supporters, in the present as in the past,—in proof of the assertion, that its prime object is, *to preach the Gospel*, to increase religion, and that it uses theology only as an instrument for the accomplishment of this great purpose.

Have we then, as Unitarians, a Gospel to preach? I use the word "Unitarians" in its broadest sense, to include the opinions common to all our members, and also to many nominally outside of us. The question of names is of comparatively little importance, but as, for convenience sake, we need some name to express briefly our theological position, I for my part consider Unitarian as good a name for this purpose as any that can be found or devised. But in urging that *Unitarians* have a special gospel to preach, I desire to speak of the power, the duty, the mission, the God-given work of ALL

who hold the general theological views with which Unitarians sympathise—whatever name they take, or if they decline every name which they consider sectarian—even if they remain in the ranks of the Broad Church, or are numbered among Orthodox Dissenters, or if they refuse to connect themselves with any Christian organisation. All who hold the theological position which we hold as Unitarians, have in consequence a peculiar fitness and a special power for diffusing RELIGION, in this country in the present day. All are therefore imperatively called on to be active and untiring in the work of making their views known in the world, that they may become the foundation of a quickened spiritual life, and a warmer pious faith among the people.

Why is it, then, that any doubt is ever felt as to this duty? How is it that there sometimes seems to be a lack of zeal, and earnestness, and self-devotion in the manner in which *we* perform it, when compared with the action of Orthodox Christians? Probably it arises from our failing to gain a firm and strong conviction that we *have* a gospel, a glad tidings, a religious instrument that can be made the means of giving help, and strength, and comfort to our brethren. Because we do not claim for our belief that to accept it is the only way in which men can escape an eternal hell; because we do not find in it the sole key for opening the portals of heaven; because we do not regard those whose theology is different from ours, as guilty in the sight of God; because we acknowledge that there may be genuine religion united with every variety of theology—we are apt to fall into the error of supposing that belief is therefore of no importance, and of imagining that there can be no reason for our wishing men to adopt our belief. But we must be on our guard against the mistake, which Cardinal Newman attributes to religious liberalism, of supposing "that there is

no positive truth in religion, and that one creed is as good as another." For, in addition to the evident fact that while no form of theology renders religious feeling impossible, one form may be, and necessarily is, much more favourable than another for the production of such feeling—there is much in our present position and the state of things around us, that renders our views of religion of peculiar importance to the world, and that calls on us imperatively, not to be content with ourselves holding our theological belief, but also to employ it as a means of good to others.

For what are the facts of the case? No one of us doubts that religion, in its essential features, is a blessing to man; we are convinced that the one greatest boon we can confer on a brother, is to help him to gain the faith and hope and love, which nothing but religion can bestow. Yet we all know how many of our fellow-countrymen are at this moment totally destitute of religion, how large a proportion of our population are entirely uninfluenced by it, and what an important class there is, of thoughtful, intelligent, and practically moral citizens, who frankly declare, that to them all forms of devotion appear unreal, and all faith in spiritual things seems a mere superstition. In spite of all the earnest efforts and devoted labours of Christian churches, of clergymen, preachers and missionaries, the number of the doubters or deniers, of those to whom religion is not a reality, of those whose hearts are untouched by it, and whose homes and lives are unblest by its influence, is constantly increasing.

Why is this? Whence comes this state of things, one, as it seems to us, so deeply to be deplored? It is not that human nature has changed, that it has no longer the need of a divine love to depend on, or the power of aspiration to lift up the soul into a divine presence. It is not that any

condition of civilization or enlightenment has been arrived at—or ever can be arrived at—which makes religion undesirable or impossible. It is not that science or philosophy has enabled man to outgrow religion; for while the heart can love, and the soul can feel reverence, and the conscience can speak, man must remain susceptible of devout feeling. But it is quite possible for a man, or a body of men, or an age, to outgrow some *particular form* of religion, and to become incapable of accepting those doctrines and practices which satisfied their forefathers. Many men and women there are now, who *will* be self-dependent, will use all the powers of their nature, will cling to the conclusions science and philosophy teach them, and to whom therefore the creeds and ceremonies of some forms of Christianity are impossible. Either they must remain without religion, or they must meet with it in some presentation, in which they can honestly and heartily accept it. It is at such a crisis as this, that Providence puts it in *our* power to offer to them a veritable Gospel; and I hope to show that we may so present it, that it will gain a glad welcome and receive a life-long allegiance, in the case of many who, for want of so understanding religion, are now, and if left to themselves must remain, totally devoid of that spiritual light which might cast beams of brightness over their earthly path.

To show this I must briefly refer to the peculiarities of our theological position and religious faith.

The greatest privilege and the highest honour granted to man, is the ability to gain what he needs by the exertion of his individual powers. That which is given him by another, without effort on his own part, is never worth so much to him, as that which he himself earns. The possessions we may truly call our own, are those which result from the

exercise of the several capacities of our nature. The knowledge arrived at by careful study and patient investigation, is more valued than that which is merely the result of information offered by a teacher. The belief which springs from the action of our own understanding, and the conclusions of our own reason, is the only belief that rightly deserves the name. The duties that are performed in obedience to the dictates of the individual conscience, are the duties that are felt to have an imperative claim upon us. In like manner in religion ; if we are to have a faith that is deeply rooted in the heart, a spiritual vision that can discern eternal realties, a love that nothing can conquer, and a practical influence that will master every temptation, and regulate the entire life—these must result from the exercise, in reference to religion, of the intellect, the affections, the conscience and the spiritual instincts, which God bestows on each of us. The perception of this, and the conviction that our powers may therefore be used in religious matters without any fear or hesitation, nay more, that their employment is a duty as well as a right, is the foundation of the LIBERTY of which we often boast. With no external authority to bow down to, with no foregone conclusions that *must* be adhered to, to hamper us, with no threat of consequences to terrify us, we can use the intellect in the search for truth, can trust to the conscience in the convictions as to duty, can open the heart to the throbbings of devotion. It is because we are convinced that we can trustfully and hopefully depend on our own nature and our God-given powers, that we are free ; and it is because we are strict in maintaining this freedom, that we may arrive at the desired result by this use of our powers.

Among Unitarians, no ban is laid on any part of our nature ; the harmonious and accordant growth of all its

capacities is regarded as the highest good, the true salvation, of which we are capable. Especially the cultivation and development of the moral nature, the right comprehension of its action, and the constant appeal to its teachings, lead to the highest conception and firmest belief as to God, and the noblest achievements in accordance with his will. Such an attention to the moral powers of man, as the basis of religion, is what has given weight to the utterances of the Unitarian preachers and writers, who have had most influence, alike in England and America. Thus our freedom is not a mere negation, not solely the absence of restraint, the throwing off bondage, the refusal to bow to human authority. It is something much more important than this, being positive and strongly affirmative, the assertion of the trustworthiness of our own powers, and the determination to use and improve these powers, and to depend on their leading and teaching.

Now this is exactly what is needed, in order to give religion a substantial and permanent hold on the minds of many men in the present day. As intellectual progress has gone on, generally and rapidly, the sanctions on which stress was formerly laid, and on which dependence was at one time universally placed, have one after another lost their power. Once the Church was the sole authority; now those who perceive that the Church, being only a union of fallible men, must itself be fallible, need some other test of truth and duty to appeal to. To many Protestants the Bible is the ultimate authority: but if the Bible is a collection of writings by fallible men (be they who they may, even prophets and apostles), to know what they thought or taught, while it is a valuable help to us, is not in itself enough to prove beyond doubt what is true or what is right. Again, men have sought to rest in the guidance of great religious

leaders ; but, without losing reverence for these leaders, while thankfully acknowledging the noble work many of them have accomplished, and rejoicing to feel the influence of their lives and their spirit, and to receive aid from their thoughts and their example, men feel that the fact that any one of them believed a doctrine is not enough to establish its truth ; the fact that one of them thought a course right does not make it a universal duty. Hence the religious convictions of men who find themselves in this position are shaken to the foundation. Science opens to them her revelations, and encourages them to examine freely, to welcome new discoveries, to hail with delight all progress. Philosophy appeals to the reason, and offers proofs of its conclusions that the intellect can test and the mind can depend on. If, then, religion comes with a totally different story, another method of procedure —claims obedience on the ground of an infallible authority —bids them submit rather than enquire, yield to another rather than exert themselves, talks about mysteries that require the reason to be ignored—they turn from it in disgust, and many of them, finding that the basis of religion which once satisfied mankind is altogether unsatisfactory to them, hastily jump to the conclusion that to *them* religion is impossible. "We can know something," they say, "about material science, but about spiritual things we have no ground of certainty, and all speculation about them is waste of time, all feeling about them is sentimental self-deception."

This is exactly the case which our views of the foundation of religion can meet. We say to such persons : you have yourselves, your own nature, your own powers, your consciousness, your instincts, your reason, heart, and conscience ; use these, trust in them, improve them, and try if religion will not spring from their thoughtful, life-long culture. We offer them a conception of religion which each man may

hold for himself, resting assured that no intellectual mistake, if not the result of indolence or prejudice, will bring on him condemnation as though it were an immorality, and that he may therefore boldly rely on his own nature, finding in it, when rightly used and improved, the seeds of duty and devotion, the source of belief and faith, conviction and feeling, in reference to spiritual realities.

This view of the basis of religion enables it to go hand in hand with the most rapid advances of science and philosophy. When theology is studied on a scientific method, with dependence on the same human powers of observation and reflection which are employed in material science; when religious philosophy is made a parallel to mental and moral philosophy, like them, the examination by means of consciousness and reason, of an inherent part of human nature; when the domains of theology and religion are kept distinct, the one being treated as depending on the same method of proof as other sciences, and the other, while it is intimately connected with theology, going much farther and calling forth spiritual experiences that defy definition; the consequence of all this must be that religion has no fear of the teachings of material science, no shrinking from the boldest speculations of philosophy, but rejoices in them as helps in the general progress of humanity. Familiar with the fact that those who hold opposite theories on scientific subjects, are all equally true and honest men, all equally warm friends and good citizens—knowing that the scheme of philosophy a man adopts does not decide how much sympathy he shows in his home, how much self-sacrifice he is capable of to help a brother—we may practically recognize the truth that, think what men may about theology, they can, with all its various phases, have the love of God in their hearts; and that religion, a thing of feeling, a state of

the affections, is compatible with every variety of theology. We prefer our own theological belief, because to *us* it is true and is practically useful, but while we hold fast, and love, and preach, *our* gospel, we dare not, for this reason, claim that we have a greater depth of feeling or a truer faith and a warmer love, than are found among worshippers whose belief is most widely separated from our own.

Closely connected with the view that religion is founded on human nature, is the conviction that, in connection with it, we must get rid of all notions of partiality in the dealings of God, and of peculiar privileges in the case of any section of mankind. Such notions are curiously intertwined with almost all prevailing theological phraseology. Religions are divided into "natural" and "revealed," as though God's Spirit had helped men to the one, but had nothing to do with the other. A certain class of men are termed "the people of God," even as one nation of old was spoken of as "chosen." One book is called "holy," one history "sacred," as if other books were necessarily all secular, and other history must be all profane. Many religionists go yet further, contrast the "elect" and the "reprobate," the "saved" and the "doomed;" nearly all Christians draw a broad line of distinction between the inspiration of the past and that of the present. But God is without variableness or shadow of turning. He loves all his children with the same love, treats all with the same tender care, is a true Father to every one of them. Religion is not a mere legacy from ancient times, the faint echo only of which comes down to us through the long vista of the ages, but equally a possession and a reality to-day. It is not confined to the professors of one creed, the followers of one prophet, the performers of one set of ceremonies. Its power is not

limited to one dispensation, so that we must speak of one form of it as true and of all others as false. Its influence is not exerted to procure the salvation of only a section of mankind. Its privileges are not the monopoly of a single church. It is universal and perpetual. The facts on which it depends are not those of one age, but are common to all humanity. The duties it enforces are not those of the devotee or the enthusiast, but as widespread as the race of man. Its basis is not a partial revelation, but human nature and the perpetual working of the Spirit of God.

The difficulty, in many minds and hearts, which stands in the way of the adoption of religion, is the conception they find prevailing of it, as something exceptional, limited to a few, taking them out of the list of the great mass of their fellows, showing something like favouritism on the part of God. Only let it be understood that all forms of religion possess some truth, while none of them have all the truth, and that it is quite compatible with the respect due to *all* forms, to prefer one, as having to our minds more truth, more power, more beauty than the others, and much of their difficulty will disappear. They hesitate to believe that a certain history is an exception to all other histories, that one nation was divinely taught and miraculously guided, while all others were neglected in uncared for darkness ; but show them that God never left Himself without witness, but that in the whole course of human history his Providence has been leading onward his people, step by step—that the laws of nature are the plan on which his activity displays itself—that inspiration, as it was in time past, is now and ever will be—that the facts of religion are broad and wide as humanity itself—that the dealings of God with man are the same in every age and in every land, the human family being one great whole and God the universal Father,—and

religion is thus placed on a foundation that reconciles it with the understanding of man, while it commends it to his heart; being universal and perpetual, it appeals to facts as widespread, as general as the human race itself.

But it may be said, that all I have now urged relates to the way of approaching the subject rather than to the subject itself, to the method of seeking religious truth and feeling—not to the truth thus arrived at. Have we then, no definite theological doctrines to present to the world, as the substance of the gospel we preach? I answer, we have, and they spring naturally from the fundamental conceptions, on which I have been dwelling. We worship God as our Creator, Inspirer, and Father. In all these relations, we view Him as active in the present as well as in the past. When the first verse of the Bible declares, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," it tells only a part of the truth. The teaching needs to be completed by the addition,—"God is every moment creating." The work was not done once and then abandoned to itself. The universe is not a mere machine, wound up and set going at the beginning, and then left alone. All growth is slow creation. God is never absent from the material universe, but is still living and working now, and every movement and change and productiveness of nature is an evidence of his presence and his activity. So as to Inspiration, this does not mean that God once spake to men and has ever since been silent; that He revealed his will to prophets in ancient days, but that now his voice cannot be heard; that ancient Jews received communications from Him, but that modern Christians are fanatics if they hope to be moved and guided by his spirit. He is no respecter of persons, but every one who rightly seeks it, in every land and every age, may feel

the divine influence—not, indeed, granted in equal measure to all, any more than are his other gifts, but absolutely refused to none. And the Fatherhood of God means more than a name; it carries with it the double lesson, that his love is universal, and that all men are his children, all, therefore, partakers of the divine nature. He is a Father, not to a chosen few, not to one nation or one generation only, but to every human being, making all alike his children, and all, therefore, capable of spiritual progress, all cared for by Him, who sends his sunshine and his rain on the just and on the unjust, and is merciful even to the unthankful and the evil.

On the same principles, when we reverence Jesus Christ, because he was the Image of God, we look on him as exhibiting, in an especial degree, that which is common to all mankind, the presence of the divine in human nature; and while we treasure our knowledge of him, as the highest example we have of what the religious nature of man may rise to, the most striking proof of the existence of "a spark of fire divine" in us, as children of God, he is yet but a higher manifestation of a universal fact. The presence of God is now seen, and may be always seen on earth, in human form, in proportion as man cherishes and cultivates the divine within him. The proof that God cares for us and loves us and would save us, is not offered once only in the history of the world, but is given every day and every hour, and in every manifestation of Providence, whether present pain or present pleasure.

It is the same in regard to all the doctrines of theology. Did time permit, I might show how the application of the fundamental principles, of dependence on our own nature and its powers, and of treating religion as universal and perpetual, produces the various doctrinal and practical

results at which we have arrived; how it teaches the nature of Sin, its effects and its remedy; how, by giving all men equal and natural access to God, it destroys every vestige of priestcraft; how, by producing a reverence for our own nature, and an effort for the improvement of its powers, it enables us to look forward to a heaven, where at last all God's family may be gathered together—no wanderer lost—not, indeed, all equally near to Him, but at least with no child eternally shut out from the light of his countenance.

Here, then, we have a Gospel to preach, and one peculiarly meeting the wants and requirements of many men in the present day, because it leaves them free from all unnatural restraint; because it is placed on no partial or exceptional foundation, but on facts as general as humanity itself; because it recognises the universal Fatherhood, the unceasing Presence and Activity of God; because it treats man as the true child of God, ever capable of gaining communion with the Father; because it is in accordance with the teachings of science and the pointings of philosophy; because it urges each to think his own thoughts, do his own duty, say his own prayers, and work out his own salvation, while all are bound together by the ties of a universal humanity; because it recognises the importance of the present world, and the necessity of making the best of it and doing well its duties, while it also points to spiritual realities and encourages the hope of Immortality. It is a gospel which may set free the slaves of sin, may answer the difficulties of the doubter, may subdue the animosities of rival sects, may expand as knowledge increases and develop with each advance of thought, may meet the wants of each aspiring heart and comfort the sorrows of each suffering soul, and nerve and strengthen the efforts of each dutiful labourer in the work of life.

Such is the position, my friends, in which God has placed us, in regard to religion. The great question is, to what extent will we be true to this position, how far will we discharge its duties? Do we work as becomes those who have the powers, the privileges, the great principles, the wide opportunities *we* possess? Liberty is a glorious thing; we do well to treasure it, and to be jealous of all infringements on it. Truth is a noble possession; we do well to be thankful for the beliefs we have, which we have good reason to consider true. But yet better than either Liberty or Truth is earnest Work. Liberty is principally valuable, because it is the condition which is needed that we may work successfully. Truth is important principally, because it is a means of working effectually. Work should be the result. When the man who has been enslaved rejoices to have his shackles struck off, if he be a true man, it is not because he can now sleep more comfortably, but because now he can work more actively and more effectually. When the man who has been rescued from the dominion of error, finds new light poured into his mind, he rejoices in the intellectual progress, if he be a real lover of Truth, not that he may gloat over his fancied superiority to others, but that he may make what truth he has a means of progress for himself and his brethren. Nay, more than this, there is no true and permanent liberty for the slothful, there is no continued and increasing possession of truth for the selfish. If we would preserve our Freedom, if we would make progress in our Knowledge, we must be actively engaged in winning more and more freedom and more and more truth, and in extending what we do possess to those around us.

It was from a perception of this duty, that this Association sprang into being, and it is a conviction of its importance

that should influence every one who joins it. As I said at the beginning of my discourse, our object is a simple and a practical one, to preach the Gospel, to spread religion, in the form in which we hold it, and placed on what we conceive to be its true foundations. There will be danger of our imperilling this object, if we allow our attention to be diverted from it by any other objects. It seems to me (and I may be permitted to speak freely my own conviction, whether all who hear me agree with me or not) that if we attempt to make the Association a means of consolidating any kind of denomination or ecclesiastical organisation ; if we aim at using it to establish the influence, or augment the power of any individual or number of individuals ; if we strive through it to sway a group of congregations, or to impose on them—either with or without their formal assent—any uniformity of belief, or constitution, or ritual ; if we seek to render it the instrument of one school of thought existing amongst us, to the exclusion of others ; if we forsake the domain of practical work, and substitute speculation or doctrinal disquisition ; in one word, if we deviate a single step on the right or the left from the simple object of spreading religion in the world, we shall thereby lessen the power we here have for good, and in proportion as we lose sight of the one great purpose, shall weaken and may ruin the Association ; worse than this, we shall lose the great opportunities, and leave undone the noble work God has granted to us. The members, I trust, all agree as to the main objects and fundamental principles of the Society. There may be minor differences of opinion, but notwithstanding all these, there is sufficient agreement, if only there be mutual tolerance, and wide, true-hearted sympathy, to enable all cordially to work together. It is an injurious abuse of individualism, if it

causes us to lose all the power that might result from the co-operation and associated effort of numbers. But in order for a number of persons to unite for a practical object, each of them must, *as far as the union is concerned*, sink some of his individuality—not give up any *principle*, that no one would advocate—but put on one side, it may be, some personal tastes and preferences; beware of insisting on mere crotchets, be more anxious that work should be done, than that it should be done in his favourite way and according to his chosen method. He who by self-assertion, by readiness to debate and divide about matters that are not essential, by the tendency to see causes of offence where none exist, by magnifying differences, and insisting on carrying everything his own way, imperils the existence, or lessens the usefulness of the Association, has a heavy responsibility to answer for.

There are now, happily, no burning questions before us, on which a difference of opinion may be anticipated. Why then may not all the energy, all the zeal, all the self-exertion and self-sacrifice, which have sometimes been thrown into the discussion of such questions and the battles about them —why may not all these be now concentrated into one great, general, united and strenuous effort, to do more work than we have ever yet done or even attempted. Such will be the result, if only we have the conviction, that God has given us a Gospel to preach, a means of conferring spiritual blessings on mankind, and that in giving it to us, He lays on us necessity to preach it; alas for us if we preach not this Gospel!

May God help us to be true to the duty He assigns to us. It is no slight object, no small task, no temporary work, to be accomplished and completed in a day or in a generation. It is the task which has been engaging the efforts of his true

servants in the past, and will be their work in the future,—the saving of immortal souls, the rescuing them from religious indifference and indecision, from doubt and dread, in many cases from despondency and despair. It is the attempt to establish more and more of the reign of God on earth, by bringing home more and more of his love to the hearts of men. It is the work which the prophets and martyrs of all ages take part in. It is the work which Christ recommended for us, and in doing which we best show ourselves his faithful followers. If true to such a work, our Association will prove itself worthy of the great men who, in the past, foretold it and laboured in it; it will establish for itself a lasting hold on the zeal, the love and the labours, of the present, and of future generations.

THE

DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

In Essex-Street Chapel, London, May 19, 1880.

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The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, in accordance with its First Rule, gives publicity to works calculated "to promote Unitarian Christianity by the diffusion of Biblical, theological, and literary knowledge on topics connected with it," but does not hold itself responsible for every statement, opinion or expression of the writers.

THE DESOLATION OF JERUSALEM.

LAMENTATIONS ii. 9, 10:

"The gates of Jerusalem are sunk into the ground; the Lord hath destroyed and broken her bars; her king and her princes are among the Gentiles: the law is no more; her prophets also find no vision from the Lord. The elders of the daughter of Zion sit upon the ground and keep silence: they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth."

Is there ode or elegy in literature more tragic than the wail of Jeremiah over Jerusalem destroyed? No narrative in history or romance surpasses in dramatic point the story of the patriot prophet. Constrained by very fidelity to God, to king, to country, to seem the traitor and the coward, in his own day both hated and despised, he laid, by his word and life, the foundation of a fame pure and bright in succeeding days beyond that of the mightiest counsellors who had preceded him, second only to the shepherd-prince who founded Israel's glory, and stood through centuries, and still stands to the scattered people, the ideal symbol of the kingdom of Jehovah. But in the lamentation of our text, we meet Jeremiah, whether in person or in portraiture, plunged

in the lowest depths of despair. Jerusalem, the prophet-city, lay broken in the dust. The squadrons of the conqueror had ridden through the breaches in her walls. Her temple was no more; its sacred vessels were grasped by the victor's hands. Royalty was captive and prophecy was dumb.

How could the religion of the people of Jehovah ever revive? All was destroyed on which it had rested. No sacrifice; for there was neither priest nor altar. Nay, save in the immovable heart of Jeremiah himself, no more any faith in Israel's God; for had not Josiah himself, spite of completest faithfulness to Jehovah, spite of Jehovah's reiterated pledge, been slain on the field of Megiddo? And so hope had faded out of the heart. The faith of Israel was dead. Who should rebuild its waste places? Who should ever build a New Jerusalem?

That moment of desolation between two eras seems not unsymbolic of the moment in the great story of mankind at which we are now met. The Old Jerusalem is gone. Thousands despair of a New Jerusalem.

Yes; the city of Zion is laid low. Our fathers, nay, our elder brothers, had a city that they called the perfection of beauty; they desired to proclaim it a joy for the whole earth. And though, as in old Jerusalem, the enemies hissed and gnashed their teeth, those predecessors of ours were persuaded that firm would stand the walls of their city of peace against every violence and every strategy.

For to our Unitarian forerunners—nay, many of us may say to ourselves—the city of the faith was compactly built and walled around and coped with battlement and tower, which it seemed that none might successfully assail. But the old walls are levelled to the ground, the city is trampled by the eager feet of the foe.

In the old days there was a ring-wall round our theology. It was all packed within the Bible. That was the boundary, and that was quite secure. It could not be a very hopeless task to explore even its lanes and by-ways. To drop the metaphor, the Bible was the ultimate and perfectly satisfactory court of appeal, quite consistent with itself, quite authoritative.

And from this Bible the leading topics of theological belief came out clear and simple. We did not indeed venture on pressing the doctrine of a divinely chosen people confined to one strip of earthly territory. But this tiny earth, and mankind dwelling upon it, we did very complacently treat as practically the chosen land and the chosen people of God. We regarded the plans of creation as laid out with a special view to the spiritual convenience of the inhabitants of this little planet. And the duty and the destiny of that race Christ had distinctly, authoritatively and sufficiently revealed. The Christian commandments were plain for him who ran to read. The resurrection of Jesus Christ was all-sufficient proof of the immortality of man. We perhaps ventured to acquiesce in the statement of Norton, that

"the words of our Saviour are not always reported with perfect correctness;" but we dreamed, no more than he, how tremendous the inrush of the waters of destruction, of which that little rift in the dyke was the beginning.

And what of our Jerusalem now? "Her gates are sunk unto the ground." The old strongholds are shattered to the dust. The Bible? Where is that ring-wall? Christ? Where is his authority? Immortality? Where are its proofs? God? How many vainly beat the air! You are Unitarians still; but your brothers and sisters, your sons and daughters, how many of them declare that God is far off and they cannot find Him!

Now, there is no more miserable cowardice, no more flagrant unfaith, than the refusal to face and recognize this prodigious revolution in the thoughts and faiths of men. Of course the men who have yielded to this sweeping tide of opinion and abandoned their old positions may be quite unwarranted in doing so. I am not now concerned to maintain that that broad and general authenticity and authoritativeness of the Jewish Scriptures which was firmly held, for instance, by Channing, is not still tenable by wise and prudent men. I am not now concerned to discuss the nature of the mastery of Christ over the mind of the Christian world. I am not now concerned to dispute that an argument for human immortality might still be built up on the evangelistic basis. I am not concerned to deny that the impress God made on Prophet and on Son in those far-off days is still proof enough that God bends with the breath of

inspiration from heaven to earth. Put to the question, I might personally answer one of these tests this way, another that. But this to-day is my affirmation, and I know not what man will deny it, that, for good or evil, the old, comfortable proofs are paralyzed for the generation now rising up in our churches, and that for these men and women of to-day and of to-morrow, with the proofs, the beliefs themselves are at least imperilled.

How can it be otherwise? How can we base our religious creed and life on Gospels and Epistles in these new times? Suppose my friend dispute with me to-morrow, and persuade me altogether that every Epistle inscribed with that illustrious name does really come from the hand of Paul; that the fourth Gospel is the veritable work of the beloved disciple; that the Synoptics were written straight off by Matthew and Mark and Luke; that, according to Paley's argument, where the Book of Acts agrees with Galatians and Corinthians it shows its faithfulness, and where it differs from them it shows its independence. Such was the critical position of our fathers, men of scholarship and judgment in their day, and it made the foundation for a well-defined theology. But suppose my friend convince me of all this to-morrow, with scholarship and breadth of knowledge overmatching mine, as well may be. What, then, is gained? What will it avail? Can I build up my theology thereon and rest? How is it possible? To our fathers these relations of the documents were *facts;* and faith can found itself on facts. But to us they cannot possibly be more

than mere *opinions*, held to-day, but possibly to slip away from us to-morrow. For do we not know that men of transparent honesty and brilliant faculty and solid erudition hold otherwise with intense conviction? Do we not know that mighty scholars deem the Synoptics the slow organic upgrowth of a century, encrusting in their spreading folds the successive sentiment and dogma of decade after decade? Do we not know that accomplished critics hold the fourth Gospel, howsoever the light of the Holy Spirit scintillate through the marvel of its language, the work nevertheless of one indebted not alone to Alexandria and Philo, but even to Rome and Justin Martyr? Do we not know that conscientious students deem that nine of the Pauline letters are Pauline only in the sense that they would fain shelter under the patronage of Paul's repute, while that repute itself must rest on those four grandest only, and that the theology of Paul, wonderful, superb, was after all a theology undreamed by him of Nazareth? And do we not know that illustrious scholars deem that that so-called record of Apostolic Acts is little better than a romance for the sake of peace? Do we not know that, rightly or wrongly, these things are held by men truly mighty in the Scriptures, and that half of our own pastors and masters also are persuaded that so these things are? What could it avail, then, for you or for me to be convinced that the weight of argument still turns the scale the other way? It can but be literary and historical opinion at the best, and such opinions must ever be held

with the consciousness that some new testimony may at any time reverse them. But in such a way as that we cannot hold our FAITH. RELIGION cannot rest on such foundations. We cannot afford that this vital principle of our being shall depend on which way the wind of Biblical criticism blow to-day or to-morrow. And so, when once we have seen that the old authenticity and authority of the documents may be overturned in the hurricane, it is no use simply to peg up our tents again. We must pitch them somewhere else.

So that it seems to me that, while these questions of documentary criticism must always possess an absorbing interest, and while we cannot help some little personal proclivity displaying itself in the midst of our literary discussion, and while doubtless much on both sides still remains to be said in that discussion, yet nevertheless they are unwise and very dangerous friends who would strive to keep the argument concerning religious faith in that region of debate, or decoy us into resting the asseverations of our religion on ground within this domain. No; whatever be the final verdict of criticism, if religious conviction is to be independent of mere literary opinion, we must build on some rock of faith against which the storm of such discussion shall ever beat in vain.

And happily, in rejecting the notion of a literary basis for our faith, we are really returning to the one enduring foundation on which religion has in fact always been built up. That foundation is that nature itself which

God has breathed into us as human beings. While that nature itself endures, religion also will endure, though it seem to suffer many catastrophes, and again and again the timorous may be alarmed that what they deemed its basis collapses before their eyes.

In deepest truth, even our honoured fathers, who held tenaciously the old view of the special authoritativeness of the Bible both for history and for dogma, no more drew from it their fundamental assurance of religion than did Jesus draw his from the Scriptures of Israel, or Paul his from what Peter told him of the Master during those fifteen days in which he enjoyed the hospitality of his future antagonist. In Jesus, in Paul, the faith was a well of water springing up *within* them to eternal life. And in our fathers it was so too. Who will maintain that that Evangelist of the West whose centenary a grateful world but now has celebrated, really based his faith on written Gospels? The faith was inscribed on the fleshly tablets of the heart. It was God's voice in him ever that found utterance upon his tongue. His speech was in essence ever as much a "Thus saith the Lord," as that of any hairy-mantled Hebrew prophet. And if he loved the evangelic records with an unbounded love, it was that there he found the mirror of all his own purest thoughts and sublimest aspirations; and they derived authority from his heart in its still communion with the Heavenly Father, and his word did not derive authority from them.

Thrown back on the ineradicable demands of our

religious nature for the basis of religious faith, I, for one, believe that we shall not find that disappointment is in store. It is not the first time that that necessity has been laid on men. And those imperishable instincts inwrought in the human soul, as they create the need, will supply it also by the sure law of God.

Not in a day will the reconstruction be achieved; and he would show temerity indeed who, while still the air is thick with the dust raised by the crash of the structure that has fallen, should attempt to trace the outline of the gracious building that is to be. Yet even already we may perceive material lying waiting to the hand.

The dominant philosophy of our time—that of which the master-thought is the extension of the methods of plant-growth to all the items of the universe, both physical and spiritual—has necessarily seemed, in its first mastery of the minds of men, to thrust the creative energy out of the realm of being. Yet surely this effect is solely due to the fact that imagination, hitherto untrained to so vast a scope, reels and totters before the stupendous magnificence of the conception. Bring some boy, whose converse with nature hitherto has been but the sight of a smoke-stained strip of sky above the purlieus of some city court, into the spring-tide fields, set him to watch the daisy unfolding to the dawn, or to visit hour by hour the sunny spot where some seedling is forcing its eager way from burial to the light of day, and the first pale pair of leaves open to the balmy air; and the impression of personal agency is stamped upon

his mind with force wholly irresistible. And so, could we behold this evolution of the worlds, immeasurable as it is in space and time, compressed into the limit of an hour, the vivid agency of God would be wrought into our consciousness so that no philosophy could ever erase it more. Behold the spinning universe of primeval cloud fling off its fragment a myriad leagues in girth; behold that fragment whirling itself from a formless mass into a well-rounded globe, throwing off its heat, hardening at the crust, cracking here and heaving there, gushing out with many waters, swinging forward ever through the galleries of space, while rock grows up on rock, and continents and oceans shift, and climates sway to and fro from glacial cold to tropic heat; then from the protoplasmic slime rise up multitudinous living things, till the surface is thickly strewn with organic life, forests spring and perish, races of beast and bird arise and pass away, and ever on the old and dead supervene in ceaseless sequence the new and subtler types of life! Who could preserve his attitude of non-committal about a God before that spectacle of marvel? And surely men only need to have their perceptions trained to realize that, whatsoever kind of agency would be needed to account for such drama pressed into a single hour, the case is no whit altered though each second of that hour be expanded to unmeasured æons.

Yes; I believe the whole drift and scope of the modern method which has flowed over all the field of human thought—science physical and moral, history, criticism,

and theology itself—and has sapped the foundations of so many systems that seemed to stand secure, is finally to make it more impossible than ever to think the supreme and energizing Will away from the system of the things which are. I believe it is to compel men to think God with a vivacity of presentation beyond aught in the annals of our race so far. For the moment, it is true, the gates of old Jerusalem are sunk. Loud are the lamentations that the law is no more, and that the prophets find no vision of the Lord. Many a great ecclesiastic is dismayed; the elders of the daughter of our Zion sit upon the ground and keep silence; they have cast up dust upon their heads; they have girded themselves with sackcloth; they hang down their heads to the ground. But already the clouds seem to roll from the brightening sky, and such as do not hang down their heads, but lift up their eyes above, behold the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

Now we, who are Unitarians, ever desire to be pioneers of the faith; and it cannot but be our ardent aspiration to have voice in the construction of the new and larger synthesis. Of all questions, then, the most urgent that we can ask ourselves is, how best to prepare for the momentous function which we are ambitious to assume.

In the New Jerusalem that is to be, what is the qualification for enfranchisement? Who shall ascend, with right of citizenship, into the hill of the Lord? Who, with right of priesthood, shall stand in his holy place?

Brethren, I hold that with unprecedented force the old answer must be given, "He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully."

In this great reconstruction, the conditions will not be the same as in some past epochs of theologic revolution. There have been crises when mighty power of thought and exquisite subtlety of reasoning were essential to the re-edification of the church. The niceties of the dogmatic contrivances of the early Latin and Greek ecclesiastics were not mere vain disputations. Their method was the method that was needed in transforming the thought-substance of Athens and Alexandria into an intellectual nutriment for Christendom. And religion had to have its season of metaphysics. Again, the critical elaborations which flourished at the rise of Protestantism were the very conditions of the breaking of the Papal yoke. The outburst of commentary and textual disquisition, rooted in deep literary learning, was requisite to the consolidation of the great Teutonic schools of Christianity. But in the faith that is to be, both metaphysics and criticism will play a secondary, however important part. In the great movement of human thought towards simplicity of idea of which we of this age are witnesses, it will not be extraordinary subtlety of philosophizing nor extraordinary range of criticism that will be the foremost need, but that purity and simplicity of spirit to which purity and simplicity of thought always comes home best.

Men and women, preachers and hearers of the Word, I am persuaded that more intensely true is it going to be than ever in the past, that it is the pure in heart that alone see God. It is to the pure in heart that the flowing outline of the rising temple alone will be revealed. Precisely those mists and clouds that rise before the eyes when the heart has mixed affections and the soul wavers in allegiance, will be most disqualifying of all possible obscurations for that vision which the people of God are about to see. For theology will be no longer a complicated system. It will no longer have multitudes of minute and subtle parts. But it will be one sublime idea of an absolute and perfect simplicity, and an idea to be wrought into vividness of realization solely by character unstained and consciousness unclouded by sin.

We have risen, indeed, thank God! above the old doctrine, so fertile of bigotry and persecution, that he cannot be of sound character who is not of sound creed too. We rejoice to know that the living saints of God are to be found beneath the Cardinal's scarlet hood and the Puritan's sombre garb no less, and that there are good men alike in the prairie camp of the unlettered revivalist of the West and in the study of the student who has rejected all the creeds of Christendom. But let us never suppose that character and creed flow in independent streams. It is the common energy of their faith in God that exalts the lives of a John Henry Newman and a John James Tayler. And if men who never pray, who never utter the voice of thanksgiving, show something

nearly approaching to saintship too, it is by an inbred piety having its source in a faith which they personally have rejected. But in the mass it is fidelity of heart alone that can unlock the secrets of spiritual truth; and that church, in these days of revolution, will go nearest to win the everlasting truth, in which men are simplest of heart, most devoted of life, of most rigid fidelity to every dictate of conscience.

How supreme, then, the responsibility that rests on us who are preachers in this crisis of the story of the Church! Fathers and brethren, it is laid upon us to keep steadfast our course, true to the needle of our conscience. They who have stood in our pulpits before us, have had their heavy tasks and brave work to do for God and man. But the great God help us in our day! We have taken upon us to speak what word we may in the solemn assembly of the people, in these pregnant times of upheaval and of change. The world needs that our word should be with power, that our vision should be clear, our message true, our gospel convincing and sustaining. And this cannot be, unless we subject every personal ambition, every worldly desire, to the high purpose of our ministry. We have to be utterly true, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to have hearts pure from all that can stain or soil, to be of single aim and most steadfast purpose, or God will not enlighten our understanding in these hard times, will not give us the vision of the Lord, will not direct our tongues to speak the living gospel to the people. Who is sufficient

for these things? Let us pray for one another in this our solemn, urgent, awful ministry!

And you who are not set apart to that ministry, who are not preachers by set speech to men, who listen to sermons and criticise them, who hearken to other men's prayers and pray them—or pray them not; you, the Unitarian people, how are you meeting the grave responsibility of the time? It is no season for compliments. Search your hearts and examine your ways. Preachers can do little; the people can do much. The life of our churches must be pure, noble, devoted, devout, if these churches are to be as a city set on a hill, if these Unitarians are to hold up the candle of the larger faith in the darkening world. So only can they find and hold and reveal to men the truth. Are you living in simplicity, discountenancing all extravagance in expenditure, in pleasure, in business absorption,—as knowing that it destroys the spiritual vision? Are you holding your wealth a trust, your professions subordinate to your religion? Are you curbing your self-indulgence? Are you strenuous in maintenance of simple and steadfast living in these times of wanton profuseness and easy luxury? Are you keeping the lethargy from your souls, the fatal lethargy that creeps over the spirit so silently and lulls men's faith to sleep?

God save our church! God help us, pastors and people! The Unitarians that have been, have founded a noble reputation for fidelity of speech and integrity of life. May the Holy Spirit inspire us, their sons and

daughters, to rise up to the height of our calling, and by sheer loyalty to our ideal to win the truth which is to redeem the world!

Brethren, it is a characteristic of our time that there is a deeper jealousy in the churches of any trenching on the honours of Jesus Christ than on those of God himself. No man loses social caste by professing his doubts if there be a Creator; but he is condemned in society who criticises the character of Jesus. The magazines of repute canvass freely the Theistic hypothesis, and Churchmen observe it with tolerance. But they turn away sorely offended if one, be he never so fervent in Theism, questions the office which they assign to their Saviour. And even among Unitarians there is less generous trust in the integrity of his motive whose Christology moves away from the olden lines, than of his who takes any other new departure. It is alleged by some that a special view of the person of Christ is essential to the welfare of our churches. Let this, then, be my last word to-day—that grave as is the inquiry what was the nature of that mightiest child of God,—pure man, pure God, or unique God-man,—even that great question sinks into mere triviality when the question rises, "Are we living in the spirit of Christ?"

Aye, Jesus may have been greeted at his birth by pæans of angels, or simply have sprung, as other men, from the pure wedded love of two human hearts. Jesus may have risen radiant from the baffled tomb, or for him, as for other men, the sepulchre may have proved

relentless. I, for my part, hold him no exception to the rule the wise man laid down of old, "All men have one entrance into life and the like going out." But though no choir of angels greeted his infant cry, though no portent of rent veil or lowering darkness marked his last dying cry, though nature yielded to his hand no manner of obedience she will not yield to men of the common clay, though gem after gem be torn from the garland of shining myth that decks his head, and only the wreath of thorns be left pressing on his throbbing brow; yet to have in us for one moment pure and strong and full that kingdom of heaven that found lodgment in his soul, would be to have risen above every orthodoxy on which the Church has built her pride and every heresy against which she has plied her scourge. I know not the details of this man's days. I have no means to lay down any dogma about his sheer impeccability. How should I? I doubt not, motions of human weakness shook even his incomparable spirit. But I know that could this world of striving, struggling, sinning, sorrowing men rise up to the height of his superb and gracious manhood, and touch the glory of his communion with the Father, that would be the coming of the New Jerusalem more clearly than any other thing that I can dream of. The garments of prodigy and legend which the Church has woven may be torn by relentless hands from the shoulders of the Christ. But, thank God! he stands forth in his simple peasant dress, most beautiful among the sons of man; and our hearts are drawn to

him with a fulness and confidence of love we knew not whilst he moved among us as a God.

The reason God has given me permits me to accept no ecclesiastic dogma about this man from professor of Trinity or Unity. But all their dogmas cannot wash out my simple love for him as the dearest, noblest brother I have ever known.

Brethren, henceforth let this be the only orthodoxy that we know—life lived like his, in sonship to the Heavenly Father, in large-hearted brotherhood to man; and this the only heresy we condemn—an unfilial pride that humbles itself not before God, a self-absorption which the sorrows and sins of our neighbours cannot break through. To be like Christ—even though we wrongly conceive of the method of his being—will be the surest way to come to have true thoughts of God. And striving all, by what light the good God gives us, to mould our spirits to kinship with that dear elder Son, let us trust one another more, serve one another more, love one another more, and help one another more to spread the radiant light of God!

Amen.

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THE

IMPORTANCE OF OPINION

IN

MATTERS PERTAINING TO RELIGION.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE

ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION,

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THE IMPORTANCE OF OPINION IN MATTERS PERTAINING TO RELIGION.

DEUTERONOMY vi. 6:

"And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart."

THERE can be no doubt that the writer of the passage from which my text is taken felt the importance of the truths which he taught. "These words shall be in thine heart:" aye, in the innermost recesses of thy being. "Thou shalt bind them upon thy hand:" whatever that hand findeth to do shall be done in the spirit of their teaching. "They shall be between thine eyes:" not simply shall they be an outward symbol, but become a thought in the throbbing brain, inspiring the brooding intellect, the creative genius, the many-gifted mind. "Thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house:" they shall be the consecrating influence of thy home, familiar in thy mouth as household words, heard in each morning's greeting, and in the last farewell to earth. "Thou shalt inscribe them upon thy gates," the gates of thy cities, the places of thy public assemblies: they shall

permeate the public life of thy nation. "Thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children:" they shall prove the best heirlooms; and when these children grow to be men and women, the eternal truths shall be endeared to them by the memories of that too transient time in which they felt most deeply the tenderness of a mother's love, the blessing of a father's guidance. Now the words which were to be thus highly valued embodied a theological truth uttered with controversial significancy in a land of many gods, and enforced a religious culture based thereon. For myself I endorse that estimate. I believe in the supreme importance of Opinion in matters pertaining to religion. To express that conviction, so as to deepen in your minds will, I trust, be an appropriate message to deliver to an audience like that which I have now the solemn responsibility of addressing.

I am about to speak concerning Religious Opinion. I venture to take for granted that you feel the importance of the religious sentiment, however vague may be its aspiration; that you are as convinced as I am that every religious aspiration, however vague, rests ultimately on the basis of a theological conception. Now, assuming these principles, I venture to say that the opinions we form on religious subjects, if clearly defined and actually realized, must make a difference to the life of practical piety and philanthropy. I cannot follow Lessing, when he says:

> "That our devotion to the God of all
> Depends not on our notions about God."

Probably I am a graceless bigot, but I am not moved by the well known objurgation—

> "For modes of faith let graceless bigots fight,
> His can't be wrong, whose life is in the right,"

for this is only saying that the conscientious moral man must be infallibly correct in all the theories he forms. I do not believe that

> "Horatio, a friend
> With few opinions, but of faithful heart,"

had a more faithful heart on account of the paucity of his intellectual ideas. I should be very sorry to maintain that

> "The poorest reasoner makes the finest man,
> And hold his logic lovelier for its limp."

I believe that we ought to worship God with our minds as well as with our hearts and our souls, and that we ought to strive to escape as far as possible the blindness of spiritual ignorance, the delusion of spiritual misconception, the imperfections of spiritual observation.

In speaking of the important part which is played by Opinion, I may first refer to the fact, that it is possible for an idea to become incarnated in an organ which is not only a living tissue, the seat of active nutritive processes, but a living mental machine, carrying on, in a strangely subtle way, processes of thought in which the opinions supplied from without play no unimportant part. An idea—caught up we scarcely know whence, heard we scarcely know when, communicated we scarcely

know how—does not pass through the portals of the senses to become mere dead lumber in the warehouse of the brain. It lives in us, it grows in us, it becomes an important feature of our intellectual character. Accustoming as the original idea was true or false, it produces a predisposition to the reception of truth or falsehood. Between the prejudice of error and an enlightened judgment there will be a strife, in which the judgment, to say the least, will not always prevail. "The judgment," says Lecky, "may pierce the clouds of prejudice. In the moments of her strength she may even rejoice and triumph in her liberty, yet the conceptions of childhood will long remain latent in the mind to reappear in every hour of weakness, when the tension of the reason is relaxed, and when the power of old association is supreme." Nay, the automatic action of the brain often qualifies our processes of reasoning, and gives the mind an unsuspected bias. But this is not all. It is notorious that mental, as well as bodily aptitudes and disabilities are handed down from generation to generation, and the nursery tale, based on some world-old superstition; the dogma, hot and strong from the lips of some fiery Boanerges; the curious speculations, or light, airy scepticisms, real or assumed, heard during dessert by the child whose attention is supposed to be quite absorbed in grapes or figs—these apprehended by the quick intelligence and strong emotional nature of the precocious child, may not only grow with the growth of that child, but may create an intellectual and spiritual bias of the

soul which shall be a heritage for weal or woe to children and to children's children.

In the second place, I invite you to consider the power which Opinion wields in the world of the Imagination. Ideas, vividly realized, read their meaning into our actual experience. We are surrounded by a fancy world, whose phenomena owe their significancy, and whose persons owe their characters, to our opinions. The world thus created may be a dream; we may even walk in a vain show; but depend upon it, so far as it is a delusion, so far will it be a snare. The consistent and persistent dream will affect our appreciation of all that we behold, just as colour-blindness changes the aspect of outward Nature; just as character-blindness leads us so often to misunderstand our fellow-creatures. If we could remain mere spectators of the ideal world presented to our fancy, it would make an immense difference to us whether that dream-world corresponded to the external reality or not; whether the vision was such as might have been seen on some Mount of Transfiguration, or such as is so often painted by the fever-haunted brain.

In the next place, Opinion has a great power, for good or evil, in the world of Thought. Wrong opinions, dogmatically taught and persistently held, are the greatest masters in the art of obstruction. There are opinions formed without the support of argument or experience. The holders of these opinions remind us of "the people of quality who," according to Molière, "know everything without having learned anything." A small minority of

the inhabitants of Raveloe held peculiar opinions on a certain topic; and when questioned as to the grounds of their opinions, and the improbability of a man doing himself a mischief without getting a profit out of it, "they only shook their heads as before, and observed that there was no telling what some people counted gain. Moreover, that everybody had a right to their opinions, grounds or no grounds." Now, I was brought up in a different school from that. A casual remark of an old tutor of mine taught me more than much of his direct instruction. Once, when I said that I thought that such and such a road was the nearest way—"Thought!" said he, with a burst of indignation, "you have no right to think." You have no right to your opinions unless you have grounds for your opinions. You have no right to "think," if by thinking you mean guessing at those things which are susceptible of experiment and proof. "If there are no proofs there are no grounds," says Ulrici, "and a belief which has no ground, if possible at all, can be no proper belief, but an arbitrary, self-made, subjective opinion." My home-grown opinion, with not a word to say for itself, but claiming attention because it is my opinion, is the most powerful because the most stupid, and the most stolid, and the most blindly-conceited enemy which Truth has to encounter.

Then there are the opinions which have been formed in accordance with the best light vouchsafed at the time, but which, when once fully developed, are fixed for ever. Such methods reverse the process by which Pygmalion

created a Galatea. Instead of carving a statue, and bringing down into it the throb, and glow, and mystery of life, they create a body of doctrine—a living being which grows and assimilates truth, and which is reckless of the waste of tissue, because such waste is only the method of a new creation; and then this living body is suddenly transmuted into stone, imperishable, changeless, but, alas, lifeless, never more to throb with new feeling, never more to be quickened by new thought, never more, save in the dream of fable, to meet the ray of a newly-risen truth with the irrepressible outburst of its praise. And woe to us, if in place of Living God and Risen Saviour communing with the growing human soul, we rear this dead idol, and with incessant cries, which no reason or truth can penetrate, persist in shouting, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians." And though the town clerk of Ephesus may allay the riot, it takes a greater than that conciliatory gentleman to cast out the prejudice engendered by a once living thought which has been turned into stone and adored as divine.

But, happily, there is a third form of Opinion as helpful to the cause of truth as these others prove obstructive. The true scientific theory is a tentative opinion, and we have almost outgrown the time when theory was looked upon with suspicion by the student of nature. "There are Tories even in science," says Tyndall, "who regard imagination as a faculty to be feared and avoided, rather than employed." But, "bounded and conditioned by co-operant Reason, Imagination becomes the mightiest

instrument of the physical discoverer. . . Without this power, our knowledge of nature would be a mere tabulation of co-existences and sequences. We should believe in the succession of day and night, of summer and winter, but the soul of force would be dislodged from our universe—causal relations would disappear, and with them that Science which is now binding the parts of Nature into one organic whole." Even a wrong theory, always providing that it be held tentatively, and honestly rejected when found inadequate, has its use. "At the limits of exact knowledge," says Humboldt, "as from a lofty island shore, the eye loves to glance to distant regions. The images which it sees may be illusive; but, like the illusive images which people imagined they had seen from the Azores long before the time of Columbus, they may lead to the discovery of a new world." "Theory," says Playfair, "is but the attempt to furnish an intelligent explanation of what is empirically ascertained to be true, and is always useful even when wrong. Theories are the leaves on the Tree of Science, drawing nutriment from the parent stem while they last; and by their fall and decay affording the materials for the new leaves which are to succeed."

Opinion has a great power in the world of Action. We live in a world transformed and re-created by ideas which were once such stuff as dreams are made of, and which seemed only fit for wildest visionary or most Utopian dreamer. Even so, if religious opinions could be logically developed and faithfully carried out, they

could not exist in the mind without showing their results in the life. The belief in the eternal physical torture of heretics in hell cannot be logically worked out without leading us straight to the practice of persecution. It were wise to burn the heretic at the stake, if by so doing we could save him by fire from fire; if we could stop him from spreading this deadly heresy to others. It were better to exterminate a race of heretics, than that the race should bring thousands into the world for whom the flames of hell are certainly reserved. If the awful premise is true, if the doom of the heretic has been rightly appreciated, the inference is irresistible. Then

> "The Inquisition is sublime, is love,
> Hindering the spread of poison in men's souls.
> The flames are nothing: only smaller pain
> To hinder greater."

And in those days, when "men had the courage of their opinions," they were not slow to baptize in fire and blood with results which are simply awful to contemplate. All this horror was the logical outcome of a theological opinion. And it goes without saying that if the most different opinions were thus faithfully carried out, they must produce very different results.

But I shall be told that religious opinions are not realized in the world of action. I accept the reminder, but at once retort that Unrealized Opinion is one of the most fruitful sources of evil in the spiritual world. I pass by the intellectual unbelief and spiritual indifference which often cloak themselves under the garb of a pious

Jeffries, of whom Macaulay writes, "Tenderness for others and respect for himself were feelings alike unknown to him . . . To enter his court was to enter the den of a wild beast." The doctrine of the satisfaction of the Divine justice imputes to God the very conduct which that upright judge, Sir Matthew Hale, vehemently deprecated in a recorded charge: "He desired them strictly to observe their evidence, and desired the Great God of Heaven to direct their hearts in this weighty thing they had in hand. For to condemn the innocent, and to let the guilty go free, were both an abomination to the Lord." The doctrine of public justice was once realized among men, in the massacre of Glencoe, the order for which ran thus: "As for MacIan and that tribe, if they can be well distinguished from the other Highlanders, it will be proper for the vindication of public justice to extirpate that den of thieves." But the horrible massacre was subsequently investigated by a Commission, which declared the slaughter of Glencoe to be a barbarous murder. Was I not right in saying that men would not, dare not, cannot with impunity imitate in actual life the character which their theories attribute to God? Hence they adore as a mystery in God what they would abhor as a cruelty and a disgrace in themselves.

In fact, elaborate theories and articles of belief are often troublesome in the breezes of controversy, which bring contrary winds of doctrine, and are often unusable in everyday life. Hence men have a creed which they can put on and off. They treat their thirty-nine articles of religion very much in the same way as the Wahehe treat

three forty yards of cotton cloth. Of that negro tribe a traveler writes: "In the matter of dress they are very simple and wear indifferently forty or more yards of cotton in a single piece or go perfectly naked. About one half of the people go in the latter condition; and the others, when they have anything to do, begin by taking off their clothes. The manner in which some of them wear that vast amount of cloth is very picturesque and classical, the effect being heightened by the long wands which they always carry. During windy days their whole attention is taken up in keeping it from being blown away. As a rule however, they have to carry it rolled up in a bundle in their arms, and it is a continual source of annoyance to them." "If an opinion is not true," says Archbishop Whately, "we are bound to change it; if it is true, we are bound to propagate it." Now, I hold that practice is the best kind of propagation; and if a doctrine cannot be lived as a life, it ought to be rejected as a thought. But this is not done, and hence the gulf which ever exists between the doctrine of the church and the practice of the world. Unrealized opinions leave unsettled those questions which are too awful to be so left. Is there, for example, an everlasting hell of never-ending burning? That involves a possibility so terrible to contemplate that we are bound to make up our minds one way or the other. If, indeed, like a certain "house of everlasting burning," here on earth, it was sometimes one vast lake of fire, sometimes a deep pit with no fire at all; if there was a prospect that the molten sea would

dry up, and that the volcano would become extinct, then hope might be legitimately heard. But no weird traveller has come back from hell to give us that assurance ; and I contend that we ought not to rest till we have either justified that awful dread, or banished, as far as possible, that maddening thought. I have but little respect for—

> "The polished priest, a tolerant listener,
> Disposed to give a hearing to the lost,
> And breakfast with them ere they go below."

Unrealized opinions, like checked diseases, are driven inwards ; and the bigotry which men dare not express in their actions embitters their souls. Even if you say that the opinion is wrong, and calculated to do injury, but that it is happily neutralized by some counteracting influence, that involves a possible risk and sure loss. You may overpower one pungent smell by another without making a health-giving atmosphere. The subtle influence which works on unsuspected may be a savour unto death. And to be always neutralizing the bad effects of wrong opinion can be done at no little cost of spiritual energy, at no little loss to the life of practical piety and goodness.

So important is Opinion in the world of experience. It literally grows into prejudice ; it undoubtedly colours the world on which we look ; it is an acknowledged power for good or evil in the world of thought, and in the world of action ; it exercises its influence even when unrealized. And yet there are those who say that it makes no difference what a man's opinions are. The main thing is that he should quicken his mind by the

formation of some opinion ; that he should be conscientious in carrying out that opinion ; and that he should feel the earnestness of a spiritual conviction which generally accompanies intellectual activity and moral fidelity. Now this might be true in some cases, if our opinion had no other practical effect than the discipline which it engendered. But an opinion is surely a theory in which men try to represent to their own minds an external law of the spiritual life, and the earnestness which men throw into the formation of an opinion is due to the fact that they believe that the actual truth is attainable, and that the possession of the truth will be found valuable. Now if this be so, it is necessary not only that we should form our opinions for ourselves, but that we should seek to arrive at an opinion which is in accordance with the truth. There is surely little to be gained from a sophistical argument which lands us in error ; and a man may argue well and think himself very clever, and yet argue from false premises to most astounding conclusions. A man may be profoundly conscientious, and yet be led by his conscience to commit what other men esteem crimes. Marshal Tavannes, the military director of that deed of treachery which is known in history as the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, rode through the streets (his sword dripping with blood) crying, "Kill, kill ; blood-letting is as good in August as in May." On his death-bed he made a general confession of his sins, in which he did not mention the day of St. Bartholomew ; and when his son expressed surprise at the omission, he observed, "I look

actual facts. No evidence must be rejected, every possible correction must be invited. Ah! happy are they who foresee that if their theory be true, they ought to find certain facts, and going their way find their anticipations completely confirmed. Ah! true men are they who will change or even relinquish a cherished theory, if truth demands the sacrifice. By this method, and by this method alone, can we change a tentative theory received with doubt, if not suspicion, into a discovered law of nature, acknowledged with general, with all but universal assent. But it is to be feared that this method has not yet been applied to religion so as to render possible a science of theology. Yet if men would only observe spiritual facts, and learn to interpret them correctly, and reason from them honestly and intelligently, surely something might be done in this direction. So at least the lawyer thought who speaks thus opportunely for our purpose in the story of "The Crookit Meg":—"Ye ken little of the Roman law, my freen, of whilk, in its main features, the Scots is a varra reasonable imitation. The Romans were a great people, and their law is a maist remarkable system o' jurisprudence. They had a perfect respect for facks; ay Captain, a perfec respect for facks. For what says the 'Corpus Juris'? *Nam plus valet quod in veritate est, quam quod in opinione.* That's the main distinction, Doctor, between the lawyer and the minister—the lawyer seeks diligently for facks which he can verify; the minister blethers aboot a hash o' doctrines which are incapable of identification."

For this consolidation of Opinion in matters pertaining to religion I pray, in the interest of religious truth itself, in the interest of the universal church, in the interest of each separate worshipping community.

If opinion simply represents an individual fancy to which no external reality corresponds, then it does not much matter, so far as the pursuit of truth is concerned, what our opinion is. But if there is a truth which it is possible for us to discover, then surely we ought not to be content with our individual opinion just because it is our own; we ought not to bow to the authority of another's opinion just because it is his. But we ought to ask: Is this opinion true? Does it seem reasonable? Does it correspond with the facts of the case? The only hope of finding the truth lies in our fixed determination to put our own opinions and the opinions of the wisest of the race—who may sometimes err—to this searching test. And if this method be followed, I feel sure that we should all be wiser and more capable searchers after truth; and what is, perhaps, of no less importance, humbler and better men.

I cannot help thinking that it would be a good thing for the Church of Christ if the adherents of the different sects would first of all aim at the consolidation of opinion which might come from the united support of those doctrines which they hold in common. And if they went no further than the affirmation of the existence of God, I feel convinced that this would be an immense gain to the church at large in its conflict with the pro-

contained a standing anathema against the God or Mahomet as being "solid and spherical." Nor do I think that the real lovers of truth in all churches would like one another less for the thorough discussion of differences. A negro chieftain informed a traveller lately that he was in a short time going to make war on a neighbouring tribe, "in order that they might become friends." And certainly he who makes war upon the errors of another, deserves to be called his friend. "To discover to the world something which deeply concerns it, and of which it was previously ignorant; to prove to it that it had been mistaken on some vital point of temporal or spiritual interest, is as important a service as a human being can render to his fellow creatures." If men oppose error with the desire of discovering truth, they will find that this is not necessarily a barren or fruitless operation. "It is the fashion of the present day to disparage negative logic—that which points out weaknesses in theory, or errors in practice, without establishing positive truths. Such negative criticism would be poor enough as an ultimate result; but as a means of obtaining any positive knowledge or conviction worthy the name, it cannot be valued too highly; and until the people are again systematically trained to it there will be few great thinkers, and a low general average of intellect in any but the mathematical and physical departments of speculation."

With respect to the different forms of ritual and modes of church government, there is a growing consolidation of

opinion to the effect that the eternal salvation or damnation of the individual soul does not depend on these matters. Perhaps even the benevolent Catholic would hope for a miracle to be worked to let in the heretic into heaven after long but sufficient sojourn in purgatory. But certainly the advocate of an Established Church would not dare to picture the eternal salvation of Englishmen as dependent upon the fact that they belonged to a church over which a reformed Parliament exercised a precarious sway. The supporter of an Episcopal Church would not risk the hope of his eternal salvation on the complete control with which an English Bishop sways an English diocese; or upon the perfect unanimity of thought and sentiment which pervades the bench of bishops. The Baptist minister would scarcely contend that every human body must be totally immersed in baptismal waters, or else burn for ever in a ceaseless fire. But what is not actually essential to eternal salvation may be a useful aid to faith and Christian living. The distinctive methods and customs of the churches are endeared to men by ancestral ties and by personal associations. And the spiritual unity of the Church as a whole is best secured by the varied developments of the sects. It is well that the one Gospel should be preached in many dialects of thought as well as speech. For it is (or will be) with the Church as with the United Kingdom of Great Britain. Speaking of the union of England and Scotland, Macaulay says, "Of the ancient national feeling there remains just enough to inspire the poet, and to kindle a generous and

friendly emulation in the bosom of the soldier. But for all the ends of government the nation is one. The nation is one because the churches are two." So let the church of Christ be one, because the sects are many; one in spirit, one in aim, one in common conflict with moral evil and religious apathy; retaining enough of difference to inspire the poet and to kindle emulation. Let it be one army with one leader, though there be many regiments and various accoutrements! To this consolidation of opinion in doctrinal matters, to this unity of spirit amid differing external forms, we are tending slowly, dubiously, and with many an ebb and flow of fraternal yearning. Now we see through a glass darkly, and hence are divided by our prejudice, our ignorance, our reluctance to learn from one another. But when we see face to face—when we know as also we are known—when the dream is realized—when the matter of opinion becomes matter of fact—we shall know the truth, and the truth will make us free from error; but in so doing will bind us in the bonds of a constraining grace as organs of a divine truth, subjects of a divine duty, children of a divine love. So shall we be gathered within the arms of an all-embracing unity by our common life in God—

> "That God that ever lives and loves,
> One God, one law, one element,
> And one far off, divine event,
> To which the whole creation moves."

If there is a God, if there is a spiritual world whose phenomena are facts and not mere dreams or opinions, if

the knowledge of these truths is essential to our highest well-being, and not inaccessible by our earnest thought; if there is a little prospect here, and a great expectation hereafter, of a general agreement on essential points; if difference of opinion is only useful in so far as it eliminates error and tests truth, then surely our constant endeavour should be to prove all things, in order that we may hold fast that which is good. And if this be our duty at all, it is our duty always and everywhere. We need this consolidation of opinion (always subject to correction, for we would silence no honest objection that can be raised) above all in the Christian congregation. We unite for Divine worship. Can we leave it an open question whether there be a God? We together look for exceptional guidance, and shall we have no definite answer ready when we are asked, "What think ye of Christ?" We come from beds of recent sickness, from crises of sore trouble, from agonizing thoughts, and is it well that we should have no word of assurance in answer to the question, "Why is man born to trouble?" We come from the death-bed of those whom we love; from the blank loneliness of subsequent bereavement. Is it well that we should have to confess that we have no clear opinion as to whether there is a future life or no? Which will do the soul of man—the worshipping, aspiring, suffering, bereaved soul of man—most good, to know that on all these subjects there are as many opinions as there are persons in the congregation, or to feel that there is in this little band a union of sentiment, a concurrence of opinion which gives

them in effect the same God to worship, the same Master to follow, the same theory of Divine Providence to assist them in their special trials, the same hope to deck the grave and to cheer the solitude of bereavement? That moment in which we realize a spiritual truth as a fact in the world of God, not a mere notion in the mind of man, is a crisis in the soul of the individual; but not less momentous is the occasion on which we consciously share this sense of reality with another human soul. Let the desire for this common faith be the aspiration of the united assembly, and then its worshippers might well demand that those who minister in sacred things should speak out of actual experience of spiritual realities; should come as Christ came from the Mount of Transfiguration, bearing traces of the prayer by which the fashion of his countenance had been altered. Then we might well expect that each individual hearer would be ready to exclaim, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord." "We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company," assured that on the way, and within that sacred shrine, will be found not only a mutual sympathy, but also a common faith, so that the testimony, "I believed, and therefore have I spoken," may find an echo in every heart: "we also believe, and therefore speak."

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WORK OF UNITARIANS IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE ASSOCIATION,

Unity Church, Islington, May 31st, 1882.

BY

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LONDON.

The British and Foreign Unitarian Association, in accordance with its First Rule, gives publicity to works calculated "to promote Unitarian Christianity by the diffusion of Biblical, theological and literary knowledge on topics connected with it," but does not hold itself responsible for every statement, opinion or expression of the writers.

WORK OF UNITARIANS IN THE PAST AND THE FUTURE.

FRIENDS, BRETHREN, AND SISTERS OF THE UNITARIAN FAITH—

WHEN I was a boy I had the range of an old library, in a country-house near Boston in the United States. Sometimes I would be left alone all day on Sunday, when the rest of the family had gone to the city to church. On these occasions I searched among the books for something more to a boy's taste than the folios, quartos and octavos of theology which covered most of the shelves in this collection. Among them stood conspicuous some books of which I have not forgotten the names or the authors. There were Dr. Priestley's works—his "History of the Corruptions of Christianity," his "Theological Repository," his "Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion," his "History of Early Opinions concerning Jesus Christ." And there, too, were the works of Belsham, Dr. Price, and of other Unitarians—books which would interest me now more than they did then. The library belonged to my grandfather, James Freeman, the first

openly-avowed Unitarian minister in the United States. He was an unordained reader in the "King's Chapel," Boston, the first Episcopal church established in New England. He was converted to Unitarianism chiefly by intercourse with Mr. Hazlitt, an English Unitarian minister, who paid a visit to the United States, bringing with him his son William, a bright-eyed boy, afterwards so well known as the Essayist. James Freeman announced his new convictions to the proprietors of King's Chapel, of whom the most orthodox, being Tories, had left the country during the Revolution; and those who remained agreed to reform their liturgy by leaving out all allusion to the Trinity. Thus the first Episcopal church in New England became the first Unitarian church in the United States, and it has continued to be Unitarian down to this day.

In that church I was baptized; and there I listened in my youth to our most eminent American Unitarian preachers—to Edward Everett, afterward ambassador to the Court of St. James', governor of Massachusetts and accomplished orator; to James Walker, president of Harvard College; to Henry Ware, Jun., so full of a sanctified eloquence; to Francis William Pitt Greenwood, man of most refined taste and purity of heart; and to other wise and strong men. So that I may say, brethren, I am a Unitarian, son of a Unitarian, baptized in the first church which took the Unitarian name, by the first minister who called himself a Unitarian, and educated in these principles from childhood. I know, therefore, both by expe-

rience and observation what a blessing it is to have been early taught to believe in God as infinite tenderness and infinite reason, to have been trained from the beginning to a manly, rational and free faith. Those of us who have had this privilege have been spared the long struggle and bitter trials by which others have emancipated themselves—spared the doubts which linger so long, perhaps never wholly conquered—the old terrors and distrust of God, which may re-appear like the ghost of a slain enemy. The wounds of that conflict do not close without leaving scars where sharp pains may often be felt. Honour to those who have fought their way up to a reasonable faith; but let those who have never known the trial thank God for the blessing. With a great sum have the others obtained their freedom; but we were free-born.

When as a boy I fluttered to and fro among those learned tomes, and dipped into the "History of Corruptions," or into "Belsham's Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul," hoping to find some reading to my taste, but too often disappointed, little did I think that I was one day to have this honour of addressing the representatives of those noble men, the English founders of our faith. Little did I think that I should one day receive this cordial welcome from the spiritual children of Priestley and Lindsey. For this welcome I thank you, a little on my own account, but more on behalf of the American Unitarians whom I am permitted to represent here to-day.

Our fathers have laboured—we have entered into their labours. What has been the result of their work in the past? How ought we to carry it on in the future? On these points, with your permission, I would say something to-day.

Unitarianism as a denomination is a very small body, both in England, America, and on the continent of Europe. In the century which has elapsed since its origin, it has only succeeded in planting a few hundred churches in England, and about as many in the United States. If, therefore, we are to compute its influence by any arithmetical process, we shall find it one of those insignificant quantities which mathematicians think it safe to neglect in their larger discussions.

But there are two kinds of influence. One is visible and outward, the other invisible and imponderable. One is quantitative, the other qualitative; one mechanical, the other atmospheric, pervasive, dynamic. One is measured by mass and weight, the other by vital force. According to the first measurement, Orthodoxy has a vastly greater influence on mankind than Unitarianism: but by the same mode of comparison, Buddhism has more weight than Christianity, and the Roman Catholic Church is more powerful than all the Protestant Churches combined.

Christianity advances by two methods—by outward growth, assimilating to itself new elements, and by inward spiritual action. The Master has likened the first way of development to that of a mustard-seed pro-

ducing a tree, in which all the birds of the air build their nests. The other way he compares to the leaven which is hid in the meal, working by an unseen and incalculable force, till the whole is leavened. Unitarianism is certainly not the *Church of the Mustard-seed*, but it may perhaps lay claim to be the *Church of the Leaven*.

What a stern, hard, cruel system of belief exercised despotic power over the human soul when Unitarianism began its work! Calvinism, in its linked armour of mail, stalked triumphantly through the Protestant world, like the iron man Talus in Spenser's poem. It taught the total depravity and entire inability of man, and the implacable decrees of God. It made man a slave and God a tyrant. It poisoned life at its centre, weighing like a tombstone on its joys. Human goodness, unless expressed in the forms of the Church, was declared hollow—the human reason by itself was blind. God's wrath could only be appeased by the bloody sacrifice of Calvary, and that only in favour of a few favourites, selected by an arbitrary decree, without any regard to their conduct or character. The rest of his children it was the deliberate purpose of the Almighty to plunge into an abyss of torture, never to end, and compared with which the miseries of time would be peace and happiness.

No doubt this horrible belief had done some good work in its day—no doubt it had by its terrific power broken the influence of earthly allurement, aroused an anguish of responsibility, gone like a sub-soil plough beneath

the roots of worldly habit, and created an energy of religious zeal which moved mankind. To think otherwise would be unjust to human nature and to Christian faith. But its best work was done, and its worst influences at hand, when Unitarianism arose to attack every one of its main propositions. Unitarianism denied the infallible inspiration of the Bible, denied total depravity, the vicarious atonement, election, the Church doctrine of the Trinity, conversion by irresistible influence, and everlasting punishment. It defended human nature, it liberated human reason, it claimed freedom for the intellect, it taught the doctrine of an infinite, divine tenderness, of universal salvation, and a heaven here and hereafter granted to honesty, generosity and purity of heart and life. Denounced as infidelity, excluded from all religious sympathy, branded as the church of Judas and Cain, it did not bate a jot of heart and hope. It *believed* and therefore spoke. When wise men frowned, and the timid good stood aloof, it could console itself with the thought of one of its own poets and say,

> "Truth, crushed to earth, shall rise again;
> The eternal years of God are hers."

And now, what do we see? In England and America the leading minds in the great churches have come virtually on the ground which our fathers so nobly occupied. They do not call themselves Unitarians, nor do we wish them to do so as long as they see objections to our name and methods. But whether they are one with

us or not, we certainly are one with them, with your Robertson and Maurice, your Stanley and Jowett, and the numerous other great thinkers whom you can name much better than I. Though the old creeds stand, their life has gone out of them.

The same thing is true, perhaps in a greater degree, in my own country. The labours of Channing and Dewey, of Walker and Gannett, of Bellows and Furness and their compeers, have not been in vain. Think of Andover Theological Seminary, established for the distinct purpose of opposing the spread of Unitarianism, now rent and torn by the same struggle for free thought and a rational theology! "The stone which the builders rejected has become the head-stone of the corner." The active thought in all the great denominations is on the same side.

I would not claim that these great results are the exclusive work of Unitarians. No doubt other influences, and mighty ones, have co-operated. "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes." But that the work of Unitarians is at last recognized by those outside of our own ranks, appears from that remarkable sermon of Rev. Heber Newton, Rector of a leading Episcopal church in New York, which has recently been published. How gladly and cordially he testifies to the great good done by this small body, declaring that "orthodoxy has never been the old tyranny since this controversy" began —that "its whole defensive line has changed"—that 'it has evidently experienced a change of heart." He

denies that our system is purely negative, points out that we have thrown away the husk to preserve the grain, and that in our ranks are found men who, while rejecting all orthodox formulas concerning Jesus, have a far higher faith in the Master than any such formulas can give.

We gratefully recognize in such men as Heber Newton types of liberal and rational Christianity of the noblest kind, and cannot doubt that very many preachers, and a vastly greater number of laymen, in the orthodox churches, no longer believe any one of the Calvinistic doctrines. But yet, *as churches*, they accept them all, proclaim them all, and, whenever they meet in conference or council, defend them all. For it is a curious fact that men, as members of an ecclesiastical body, will insist on retaining doctrines which they have long since given up as individuals. Thus you will find few ministers of the Church of England who will admit that they believe the Athanasian Creed, and yet no Convocation of that body has ever been willing to surrender it. It is so in the Roman Church. A large number of delegates to the Vatican Council went there wholly opposed to the doctrine of Papal Infallibility, yet in the final battle only one or two voted against it.

So long, then, as such doctrines as these stand in the Creeds, and so long as the churches refuse to modify them, it seems to me that even the negative work of the Unitarian denomination is not complete. It is bound to declare that little children are not born totally de-

praved, corrupt, and exposed to the wrath of God. It is bound to teach that if we inherit evil tendencies from those who precede us, we inherit good tendencies too; and that if every wrong action increases the tendency downward, every good and right action adds to man's tendency upward. We are called on to teach that inherited evil may be and is a source of depravity, but cannot be accounted as guilt. Depravity which is born with us, and which runs in our blood, is not something to excite God's anger, but much rather to receive His pity. Unitarianism is still needed to proclaim that God is the universal Father, who has no partialities, no favouritism, whose sun shines on the evil and good, and whose rain falls on the just and unjust. Unitarianism is wanted to oppose the Calvinistic view of the Eternal Father, as being unchristian, and false to the teaching of Jesus. It is needed to resist the dark doctrine of an eternal hell, and to declare that it is the Divine purpose to save every man from sin and misery, just as soon, and as much, as the man himself is willing to co-operate in his own salvation. It is needed to teach that no honest error can be accounted a wrong in the sight of God—that He desires all men to inquire freely, to look for all truth, to think for themselves—and that God values sincerity more than He does orthodoxy. And Unitarianism is also still needed to teach with greater emphasis than ever before, that the only way of salvation is by a good life; and that in the great day of account we shall not be asked what we have believed, but what we have done;

and that he who has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, who has been faithful, honest, pure and true, will stand higher than those who only make loud professions.

There is a wide and growing estrangement in most Christian countries between the advanced thought of men and their religious faith. One of the most dangerous symptoms of the time is the manifest hostility of many scientific men to religion, and the alienation of thinking men, scholars, writers, from the churches. In France, England, Germany, this is more and more the case. I think I may say that in my own New England, down to this time, a different spirit has prevailed. Our historians, poets, scholars, scientific men, have been believers in some rational and liberal form of Christianity. Am I mistaken in thinking that the teachings of Channing, Walker, Dewey, and their brethren, have had much to do with it? I cannot but think that their generous teaching, their trust in freedom, their exaltation of the gospel to the universal plane of humanity and love, has helped thinking men to remain Christians.

I lately attended the funeral of my friend and classmate Benjamin Peirce, Professor of Mathematics in Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was one of the first mathematicians of his time, one of the first astronomers of the time, a man with a mind so profound and far-reaching that few were able even to follow the course of his thought. Brought up in the Unitarian church, he remained faithful to the last to his religious convictions. He was an humble, trusting,

loving, but free and rational believer in the gospel. In his mind science and religion were one. His was no cold materialism, but his thought was filled with the life of the soul. His science was inspired with spiritual convictions, and reached upward to God and to immortality. If Unitarianism had any part in producing such a result as this, does it not deserve to be maintained?

The first Unitarian church in America was established in Boston less than a hundred years ago; and Boston and Massachusetts, as you know, have been the centre and fountain of this Unitarian movement in behalf of liberty, humanity and reason. In Boston also began most of the benevolent and philanthropic movements which have been developed in the United States during the last fifty years, in education, temperance, anti-slavery, prison discipline,—movements to help the insane, the blind, and other human sufferers. Was this an accident, was it a chance coincidence, that where the religion of moral reform was taught, moral reforms followed? The pioneers of these reforms have often been Unitarians. Horace Mann, the leader of the educational reform; Dr. Howe, the friend of the blind; John Pierpont, the fearless advocate of temperance; Dr. Channing, the champion of freedom; Dorothea Dix, the reformer of prisons and insane asylums; Theodore Parker, the advocate of the slave—these have all been Unitarians.

And is it an accident, a chance coincidence, that the Church which stood for freedom of thought should have had the honour of producing so many of the leading

thinkers and writers of the United States—historians like Bancroft, Hildreth, Prescott, Motley—poets like Bryant, Longfellow, Emerson, Pierpont and many others?

Many of our young people who have grown up amid those advantages may not realize what they owe to such influences. Unitarians sometimes leave the Unitarian church and go to some other church, if they happen to find the preacher more to their taste. They have a right to do so; and if it is a question of religious life, they ought to do so. But before doing this, they should ask whether they do not owe something to the cause which these Unitarian churches represent. Is it only a question of personal satisfaction, or is it not also a question of truth, of freedom, of progress, of humanity?

As, in a great battle, the centre of attack and defence will often change from one part of the field to another, so on the battle-field of thought the questions of one age are not those of another. Thus at one period theologians were all occupied in defending Christianity, and proving it to be a supernatural religion by external and internal evidences. Then the field of apologetics was deserted; and questions of church authority, church organization, ritual and liturgies, absorbed the interest. Sometimes it is Christology which is in debate, sometimes anthropology, sometimes eschatology. To the thought of the present time, all these inquiries are becoming relatively of less importance. Profounder and more vital problems call for our chief attention. We are compelled to desert the outworks and defend

the citadel. The age has moved the previous questions concerning the being and personality of God; the freedom, responsibility and immortality of man; the reality of spirit, the existence of things unseen and eternal. In England, Germany and America, many of the noblest minds find themselves unable to discover any evidence of the existence of a supreme Intelligence, the author of the universe. Some are satisfied that the theories of evolution can explain the origin of this great kosmos without the intervention of any creative power. To other thinkers, prayer has lost its meaning and value. There are those who, seeing no proof of any self-determining power in man, find it hard to justify the sense of responsibility or the obligations of morality. Many are compelled by arguments to which they find no adequate answer to regard all knowledge as phenomenal, and so are caught up into a world of unreal illusions where we have sensations without an object, and thoughts without a thinker. In regard to Christ, the question is no longer whether he is God or man, but whether we can be sure that he existed, or if he did, whether we can know anything about him. In regard to the Bible, the old discussion as to its infallible inspiration is adjourned until we can make up our minds whether these books are historic or legendary—whether they were written by contemporaries, or are only the vague traditions and speculations of later days. In regard to Christianity itself, the question is not whether it is a supernatural religion, resting on a divine authority,

but whether it is any better than the system of Confucius or as good as the teachings of Buddha.

Such are the questions we have to meet and answer at the present time. Is it not evident that those who stand on the Unitarian platform are much better qualified, other things being equal, to meet the difficulties of honest minds and to come to some satisfactory conclusion, than those who enter the field of battle hampered with the *impedimenta* of creeds, articles of faith and fixed rituals? In this new field, who has done as much to clear the air and place religion on solid foundations as your and our Martineau? This is a great work which Unitarians can do for the future, as they have done a noble work in the past. To strip religious faith of all its technicalities, to fall back on first principles, to assume nothing but what can be verified by personal experience in the soul, or by the concurrent testimony of the human race—this is the true method of science, for science means knowledge, and knowledge comes from experience. We know the facts and laws of the outward world by sensible experience; we know the facts and laws of the spiritual world by the experiences of consciousness. The vast realm of Spirit, with which the soul communes by an inward sight, is as substantial and real as that which is revealed through the senses. On this rock of solid inward knowledge will the new church be built, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. Nor shall we assume in the beginning the superiority of Christianity to other religions, and then bring

arguments to prove our position; but we shall seek for the best things in all other religions, and compare them honestly with the best in our own, and let the result take care of itself. If we find Christ to be more divine and at the same time more human than any other teacher, it will not be by accumulating texts or appealing to miracles, but by seeing what is the length and breadth and depth and height of his teaching, and by observing how profound his actual influence has been and is on the human mind and heart. In establishing the immortal powers of the soul, we shall fall back on those intuitions which are necessary and universal—which are the same in youth and age—the deep voice which speaks to the mind of the peasant and the philosopher with the same solemn and tender tones. We shall appeal to the noble sense of Freedom, which, amid all the stress of circumstances, habit, organization, testifies for ever that man is not meant to be their slave, but their master. We shall awaken the awful note of Conscience, that divine chord which reaches from earth to the stars, and whose vibrations echo through all the heavens and hells of the universe. And when we reach the greatest question of all, that which concerns the Supreme essence, the Being of beings, the ineffable Wisdom, the infinite Order, the all-pervading Beauty, the basis in which Nature and Spirit both inhere,—least of all *then* shall we dogmatize. We shall bend low, and put our ear close to the ground, to listen to the murmur of consent which rises from all created beings in aspira-

tion toward the Infinite and the Eternal. If one earnest thinker sees this vast Essence in all the combined and complex forces of nature, we will not deny that this also is a vision of the great Reality. If another finds Him in the waves of intellectual beauty which roll up for ever from the ocean of thought and life, we will endeavour to know what deep truth there is in this statement also. We will not be alarmed by the word Pantheism on the one hand, knowing that the profoundest thinkers, headed by the Apostle Paul, love to think of God as a fulness which fills all in all. Nor will we lose our conviction of the Divine Personality because of the arguments of the sharpest logic. For what are logic and metaphysics worth when opposed to facts? Personality in man is a fact, and the highest fact we know, as well as the most wonderful. The perfect unity of thought and love passing into every act of will, by which all the resources of life, memory, knowledge, imagination, are combined and made effective,—this has given to man the mastery of the world. Man is the lord of all here because he is a spiritual person. All outward things are composed of dissolving atoms, man himself is a unit of permanent force. The Supreme Being cannot be less than this; He must possess some equivalent quality which shall make Him the One in all. Otherwise there can be neither order, nor stability, nor monarchy of law, in the universe. Words and names are nothing: it is no matter with what language you describe that which no language can adequately express. Better

perhaps to say it sometimes in one way and sometimes in another, so that we hold fast to those insights, to that knowledge, by means of which old experience may attain some touch of a prophetic strain.

In this direction your Martineau has led the way here, and our Emerson in America. One is the philosopher, the other the seer, of the coming religion. On the soft spring day when Emerson was carried to his rest in the rural cemetery of Concord, a great company of those whom his words had benefited collected, in grateful memory of the help he had given them. If I may apply the words of Goethe at the grave of Schiller, this multitude seemed to thank God for the pure influence of the soul of Emerson, and say:

> "*He was ours;* and may that word of pride
> Drown with its lofty tone pain's bitter cry.
> With us, youth's struggles over, he could ride
> At anchor, in safe harbour, peacefully.
> Yet onward did his mighty spirit stride
> To Goodness, Beauty, Truth, eternally;
> And far behind, in mist dissolved away,
> That which confines us all, the Common, lay."

The teaching of Emerson has been of two great truths, Self-reliance and God-reliance. "See with your own eyes, think your own thoughts, be yourself"—this was the first main element of his teaching. This made him incapable of compromise, an independent thinker, long standing aloof from party and church, and yet never opposing them. Only a month or two before his death,

he told Mr. Howard Brown that so far from disliking the Christian name, he thought it a noble designation. He often attended the Unitarian church in his town, and a year or two ago, when Rev. Rush Shippen, Secretary of the Unitarian Association, preached on behalf of that body, after the service Mr. Emerson came to him and asked, "To whom shall the faithful offer their contributions?" He described his own state of mind in the poem called "The Problem." He had a taste for the Church and for ministers, but he would not on any account be himself limited to the forms of the clerical profession. Yet he was a great preacher, really one of the greatest of our time—recalling mankind from sense to soul, making nature a symbol of spirit, speaking with the authority of a seer of the reality of things unseen. For as his first main doctrine was "Self-reliance," his second was "God-reliance." To him, God was not a Monarch outside of the world, but an ocean of Thought and Love in which we are all included as the sea includes its waves. This ever-present Life is our strength and joy; this renews our hope, and feeds us with the living bread which comes down from heaven. This faith in the Universal Spirit saved his doctrine of Self-reliance from ultimating in Individualism; while his emphasis on Self-reliance was the counterpoise which kept his doctrine of God-reliance from dissipating itself into a vague Pantheism. His singularly pure and noble character, without a touch of egotism, vanity, greed, hate, was the lofty tower to support this beacon-light, and he stood thus a Pharos to

illuminate our darkness. So he kept up, in our day, faith in God, in the soul, in immortality, and the Divinity which shapes human ends.

And to these two leaders, Martineau and Emerson, let us add, gratefully, the name of Carlyle—Carlyle as he was in his earlier days, when he sounded that trumpet-note which rang across two hemispheres, the bugle-call which set the wild echoes flying when we were young who now are grey. He also did us the inestimable service of showing us the real world, full of marvels and wonders, which is around us, and unsealing our eyes to behold the miracle of the universe. He was a voice crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord."

This is the work the age needs. Tired of formalism, of worn-out creeds, of empty phraseology, it demands reality. The tendency to materialism is only the first outcome of this overruling appetite. Outward things at least are real, and so the spirit of the time turns first to them. But we, as teachers of heavenly truth, are to show what deeper realities are below temporal phenomena, and so at last to "o'errule the hard divorce which parts things natural and divine." Be confident of this, that man, the child of God, can never long be contented to live without God in the world.

A larger, deeper, nobler form of religion is to come. And Unitarians, if they will, can have the joy of being fellow-helpers with God in bringing it here. But let us not make the mistake of thinking that it can be accomplished merely by the dint of criticism, logic, or

metaphysical discussion. The leaders whom I have mentioned have all three done their work, not by formal logic, but by living insight. The weakness of Unitarianism in the past has been that it has addressed itself more to the speculative understanding than to the higher reason. Dialectic processes do not awaken the soul. We have proved the illogical basis of the Trinity and the errors in every one of the Calvinistic doctrines. We have confuted orthodoxy over and over again. But orthodoxy, though greatly modified, has never been formally abandoned. Why not? Because we have not yet offered in its place something fully and evidently better. The world needs, not less religion, but more; more faith in God, more love for Christ, a more profound sense of the power of prayer, a more living sense of immortality. You can easily demonstrate that the popular views of the Deity are false, the usual belief about Christ superstitious, the common petitions offered to God opposed to universal law, the Church teachings about heaven and hell unworthy of the human reason. But till you have done more than this, you have done nothing. Arguments of this kind carry with them no authority: the only voice which speaks with authority is that of insight, experience, personal faith. If we can speak what we know, not what we think—if we can testify to that which we have seen in our own souls—men will listen. If we can show that we ourselves are more full of a sense of the Divine Presence because of our faith in universal law, we shall attract others to the

same faith. If it shall appear that we who love and follow Jesus as a brother-man, feel his presence more nearly, love him better, and are more influenced by him than those who call him God, then the old doctrine will dissolve in the warmth of this higher love. If men see that though we do not pray the prayer of form, and are indifferent to liturgy, ritual, and old methods of supplication, we have a closer communion with the Divine Spirit, are more steadily fed by that ever-flowing influence, and can do all things through Him who strengthens us, then we shall have no difficulty in finding disciples to that creed. Men want more religion, not less. Until we can give them more, we shall have no hold on them; when we meet that need, they will not let us go.

Certainly Unitarians have done something in this direction; but how much more is to be done! Every great reform comes, not to destroy, but to fulfil. All that we have done in the past will sink into insignificance, if we can open the gates of this coming revelation of a new heaven and a new earth. We are now on the threshold. The world stands silent, waiting for a higher manifestation of Christianity, which shall swallow up Protestant and Catholic, Orthodox and Heterodox, in one deep inflowing tide of light and love. All human miseries look up, longing for that great comfort. All the prayers of saints ask for that living bread from heaven. The scepticism of the time, turning uneasily from doubt to doubt, is another cry in the wilderness

preparing the way of the Lord. Brethren and friends, let us go down deeper, let us look higher, and assist as God may give us grace, in welcoming the dawn of this last great day of history. In that day—though art, science, literature, will all be in harmony with religion—we shall not have less religion, but far more of it. According to that fine hymn of one of your own strong and sweet poets—the hymn which has circled the earth, and wound its heavenly way even into the hearts of those whose minds are shut in the narrowest circle—we shall be "Nearer, O our God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!" There will be more of prayer, more of love, more of faith, more of heaven on earth. And the dear Master and Brother will be nearer too, more human and more truly divine than when men called him God. We shall say to him then, in the words of Whittier:

Our Friend, our Brother, and our Lord,
What shall thy service be?
Nor name, nor form, nor ritual word,
But only following thee.

Thy litanies, sweet offices
Of love and gratitude;
Thy sacramental liturgies,
The joy of doing good.

Deep strike thy roots, O Heavenly Vine,
Within our earthly sod;
Most human and yet most divine,
The flower of man and God.

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THE CALL OF THE SPIRIT.

[A Discourse, spoken in Essex Street Chapel, London, by JOHN PAGE HOPPS, at the fifty-eighth anniversary of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association. May 16th, 1883.]

"*And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me.*"—EZEKIEL ii., 1-2.

I.

The singular book called "The prophecies of Ezekiel" contains records of a variety of experiences that to many nineteenth century men are simply unbelievable or unintelligible. "Old-world tales," they call them, to be glanced at with curiosity, or "old-world superstitions," to be treated with disdain. And indeed, from one point of view, these records *are* unbelievable. We simply cannot believe that what is here attributed to God is, in the main, properly attributable to Him. It would be easier to believe that the messages, which are said to have come from behind the veil, were the messages of a being there who was very low down in the scale even of earthly, to say nothing of heavenly, development.

Still, if we read the book in a manner at once cautious and rational, and with a spirit at once teachable and free, we shall find not a little that might suggest many valuable thoughts concerning the permanent relationships between the unseen and the seen.

I do not wish, however, to discuss the book at this time, and shall only so far keep it in view as to make my text a living root, still inhering in the book, and not severed from the place in which it grew. It is there as one of many declarations that something or some one called "the spirit" appeared to the prophet, and spoke to or through him. In this instance the words are very significant:—"Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me." There is the true prophetic

ring about this,—a note, clear, emphatic, confident. The call is heard at once: the response is immediate: the obedience swift: the result sure. The spirit summons him to stand upon his feet; and, so swift is his concurrence, that the spirit itself is said to make him do it; and then, says the prophet, "I heard him that spake unto me."

If we cannot accept this in its bare literality, as history, let us accept it as symbol: for do we not detect here the inspiration of the prophet in every age, whether of ancient or modern times? Is it not an imperative characteristic, that the prophet ever believes in a power above him, a voice within him, a "hand of the Lord upon him," even *compelling* him to stand on his feet, and listen?

This standing on the feet, then, which is here emphasised as a kind of symbol, indicating alertness, attention, readiness, surrender, is characteristic of the prophet. Other men may take counsel of custom and prudence, and authority, and the majority, but the prophet must stand on his feet, and listen to the spirit. The mob may howl at him, the learned may scorn him; the multitude may be against him; princes may persecute him; but he must stand up and hear the word of the spirit. It is his fatal prerogative, his divine vocation.

And so, looking along the far-reaching line of witnesses, where stand such men as John Wesley, George Fox, Martin Luther, Savonarola, Mohammed, Paul, Jesus, Socrates, Isaiah, Moses, we see the same thing everywhere: the prophet is held by the spirit; "the hand of the Lord is upon" him; he is called to stand up—perhaps to pass on alone into the wilderness,—or, if it must be, to drink the poison, to be nailed to a cross, to face the fire, and die. Nor does it matter *how* the spirit speaks, whether without or within; that is not the essential matter now. The vital thing is the listening for the voice that rises above use and wont, and the claims of the world, and the inducements of safety and pleasure, and that summons to an ideal. Nor is it ever implied here that the spirit's voice is always the voice of wisdom, purity, truth. It was not at all times such a voice in Ezekiel's case; and yet we must not flinch from the conclusion that Ezekiel, on his plane of development, may have been a true prophet in listening to it. In better days, reason and conscience will make the prophet receptive to wiser, purer, truer messages and inspirations: but the great thing is that he shall rise above all base clingings to self-interest, and be ready to listen and obey.

II.

This will enable us, without uncharity, and without making too large a claim for ourselves, to bring this call of the spirit to those assembled here to-day: for the meaning of what we do is all comprised in this desire or resolve to hear the spirit, to stand upon our feet, and to follow the voice wherever it may lead.

Where, then, is the spirit, that we may hear? The answer is the very life and soul of all Religion, without which, indeed, Religion is but "sounding brass and a clanging cymbal." The spirit is that by which and in which we "live and move and have our being:" it is nearer to us than the air we breathe, for it is the atmosphere of the soul. We are not outside of it, but within it as we are within the penetrating force of gravitation, and we only differ from one another in relation to it by being different in our consciousness of its presence, and in our responsiveness to its influence. It is within us all, but it does not say the same thing to all; for the light at times shines in the darkness, and the darkness apprehends it not. But it is ever the prophet's vocation to seek it, as he would seek and love his God, with all his heart, and soul, and strength, and to rise to an ever clearer vision of the heavenly ideal, to an ever clearer intuition of the spirit's meaning.

Paul, who seems to have understood these things perfectly, taught the whole rationale of this philosophy of Religion when he said, "The spirit beareth witness with our spirit." It is all in that; and if now we identify the spirit, in its purest and highest manifestations, with the inspiration of God, it will be easy to see how necessary it is on our part to make the receptive faculty in us adequate, responsive, pure.

Nor should we shrink from this as either mystical or irrational. Indeed, these thoughts should be specially cherished by *us*; for what have we to stand upon if we do not stand upon our sacred duty to the inspiring spirit? We deny the authority or the finality of the written word: we deny the authority or finality of any and every past expression of thought and feeling. Where then do we take our stand? Where, if not upon this very doctrine of the soul's loyalty to the message of the spirit to us in this our day? This is our only tenable ground for doing what we do, in breaking away from the main body of Christians. It is the only valid ground upon which we can be at once religious and rational, devout and free. We think for ourselves, we say; we submit even the Bible to the scrutiny of reason and conscience; we judge the creeds of the world; we appeal to the living soul. We ought, then, to be among the most spiritual Christians of Christendom. What we need to make us so is such a belief in a living inspiring God, as will make Him our conscious teacher, life, and guide. That would not only make us free of the world, but it would put us in possession of ourselves, and give us the very thing that made psalmists and prophets what they were, when they listened to the spirit's call.

In this way we can comprehend how this obedience to the spirit is essentially a call to self-reliance as well as to self-surrender; and how we shall obey the call of the spirit precisely in so far as we disentangle ourselves, on the one hand, from all selfish motives and become, on the other hand, true to the genius of our own faith, and hope, and love. We must not mind being different from other people. We

must not try to make it out that, after all, there is not so much difference between us. We must tell them frankly that we do not believe in their angry and offended God, that we do not believe the little child is born in sin and shapen in iniquity, that we do not believe in the possibility of incurring endless punishment for *any* sin or unbelief, that we do not believe in salvation through the blood and death of a murdered man, that we do not believe in the right of the past to control the faith of the present, or in the authority of the Bible over the conscience. We must not mind going on in our own lonely path. The spirit never ceases to send one on, here and there, as "a forlorn hope,"—never ceases to raise up here and there one and another as "the voice of one crying in the wilderness:" for the spirit needs its forerunners and its pioneers: and the John the Baptists of the world would miss their calling if they went with the priests and Levites into the temple. We must accept our vocation, even though it should make us tenfold more singular and heretical than we are. We must stand upon our own feet, and hear what the spirit has to say to *us*.

It may here be said that, after all, this amounts to no more than self-reliance, or even self-assertion; but the difference is immeasurable. Mere self-assertion is ever rooted in self-will and selfishness; but the truth here asserted is that when a human soul, rising above the clamours of the world without and the world within, conquers both that which deters and that which allures, and gives in to the authority of duty, of the intellectual, the moral, and the spiritual reason, he does not assert himself, he yields to God. This listening to the voice of the spirit, then, is not to be confounded with the exaltation of those self-centred imaginings and phantasies from which have proceeded most of the world's spiritual delusions and religious insanities. On the contrary, the true listening for the spirit must be accompanied by resolute self-repression, and may involve prolonged self-denial, in the stedfast determination to have the truth and abide by it.

This is why true prayer avails to win the voice of the spirit; for true prayer is not the buttressing up of our own desires by an appeal to the Deity to confirm them, but the uprising out of self, and the surrender of the soul to the heavenly ideal. Hence the profound truth of the saying that "the pure in heart shall see God:" for so, in very truth it is, that he who frees himself from the impurities of self-will and self-assertion, in a simple-hearted desire to have and to serve the truth for its own dear sake, does, in time, see, not phantasms and delusions, but God.

Man has a higher and a lower self,—a self that entrenches itself in the passions, or in the loves and longings of self-will, and a self that aspires, that summons to devotion, that longs to deny itself, to take up the cross, and follow the beautiful ideal. If, then, we cannot believe in the spirit with its mandates, speaking from without, it will suffice to believe in that God-inspired unselfish spirit-self, which may also be imperative in its call upon us to stand upon our feet that it

This message, then, for to-day is a call to faith, but not to credulity. We must be ourselves. In truth, this very standing upon the feet is a symbol of self-possession as well as of self-yielding; and is but a following of those who, even in the Bible, are set forth as the immediate servants and messengers of the Eternal,—who, at His word, went out, not knowing, indeed, whither they went; but thoughtful, and strong, and brave, to go. It is a call, too, to comradeship and charity, for it recognises the universal call of the spirit to *all* listening souls. God, "of old time," spake "unto the fathers" "in divers manners;" and, in later days,

> "Not to one Church alone, but seven,
> The voice prophetic spake from heaven.
> And unto each the promise came,
> Diversified, but still the same."

We claim, then, no exceptional inspiration from Heaven, no prophetic function denied to others. We "claim," indeed, nothing: but we ought to be conscious that we are claimed. For consider it. We find ourselves in the world as one of the world's manifold voices; and, for good or evil, we stand by ourselves, we speak for ourselves. But now for us the great thing is to discover whether that is the deepest and truest thing we can say—that we stand by ourselves and speak for ourselves. If that is all, then perhaps there is something in the charge that we are guilty of the sin of schism. But it is *not* our deepest and truest word. There is a mandate in our vocation, a mission in our work. Our forerunners were not schismatics and self-asserters, they were witnesses and prophets. It was the spirit that said to Servetus, and Socinus, and Biddle, and Belsham, and Priestley, and Lindsey, and Channing, and Parker, "Sons of men, stand upon your feet, that I may speak to you." And it is that self same spirit which says to us, that if we will listen, *we* shall be spoken to to-day. Only we must stand upon our feet like men, and believe.

We say, therefore, that though we claim no special and exceptional inspiration, we do claim to be among the sent of God. We therefore make no apologies, ask for no toleration, consent not to economise or dole out the truth; but take our place, and tell our message, come what may, standing on our own feet, in the sight of Him who gives every man and every Church a living work to do.

And now, comrades, fellow-worshipers and fellow-workers, is not this consciousness of the spirit's calling the very thing we need,—we, the rationalists and critics among the Churches? We have a rich harvest of thought; but do we not need the breath of inspiration? We have scholarship; but do we not need faith? We have almost all that the world can give,—except a majority: it now only remains that we draw down from heaven the joy and the hope of a perennial Pentecost. And surely there never was a people to whom this standing upon the feet, as a symbol of brave independent action in obedience to the spirit, was more possible. We have not sold ourselves to the

letter of the Bible or to the terms of a creed: we are not bound by a ritual or a rite: we glory in our liberty. Never was there a people who could so naturally and easily stand up and listen to the spirit.

All the more should we do this because it is the great example that is wanted now in Christendom: for good men and good women are now divided, and even antagonistic, not so much because the spirit speaks to them now "in divers manners," as because they force themselves to believe and live by what others said in days gone by. We know what would happen if the dead hand could be lifted from the living soul,—if all good, earnest men and women could be left to themselves, stand upon their own feet, and listen to what the spirit is saying to them now. The greatest religious reformation ever known would come to bless us, then. Divided souls would be united; contending voices would blend and harmonize; the battle of factions, churches, sects and creeds would be almost over: for what divides us is not a dividing spirit, but dividing survivals of old-time traditions, which some compel themselves to abide by, suppressing the intellect, silencing the conscience, and even stifling the affections to enable them to do it. And so Church is divided from Church, and man from man. We, then, who are comparatively free, ought to be showing all these the way. Let us, then, listen for the spirit's word to-day, and lift up longing souls for the message that God is now committing to our care.

III.

Here, then, we are brought to the special message for to-day,—a message symbolised by this incoming of the spirit, to call us to our feet.

Is it not true that many in these days have been so far affected by the leadings of the times as to be now less vividly conscious of the reality of the unseen universe, and of the persistence there of the human life and love that have been developed here? Is there not something in the air that predisposes even to the gradual effacement of God? The critical habit,—which, remember, we largely share,—and the modern scientific methods and conclusions,—by which we are largely affected,—are apt to give a bias that way, though only, I believe, as one stage in a glorious journey which is destined to land us, not in denial of life beyond the failure of the flesh, but in the demonstration of that life.

Concerning this momentous subject, of such profound gravity, and so tenderly related to the most touching, sacred, and heart-searching events in life, it seems to me that we have something to do. The old belief in a glorious Heaven, as a vast pleasure city, and of a gloomy Hell, as a tremendous penal settlement and torture chamber, is rapidly passing away. The belief in the resurrection of the body is still more rapidly fading; and, with it, the belief in the final judgment day

must go: and so we seem at this very moment to have arrived at the parting of the ways, where all must make a choice, and where the voice of mere authority, and the quotation of ancient assurances, will be of no avail.

It is overwhelmingly evident that something must be done to occupy the ground from which the ugly idol is being taken away,—that something is needed to take the place of the old Heaven and Hell; of the old mode of securing eternal life through the resurrection of bodies, dead and turned to dust; of the old machinery of retribution turning on a dramatic judgment day,—and that, if faith is to remain with us, we must satisfy the rationalistic and scientific state of mind of the present time. What, then, if we can be of specific service to the world in this emergency! What if we, who are now specially deemed the doubters or the deniers,—we who have left our father's house for a land that we knew not,—what if we, my brothers, have it in our power to build a home for the homeless, and to set their feet upon a rock, and put a new song into their mouths! What if we, who will find no difficulty in waking from the dreams of the dark ages, and in giving up the voice of mere authority and the mandate of antiquity, have at this moment in our hands the clue that may lead to the very thing men need! We are free to say frankly that we do not believe in a life of progress beyond the grave because the Bible asserts it, or because Jesus promised it, or because his dead body came to life again. We are free from these entanglements. We are free to stand on our feet, and let the spirit speak to us,—to say that we believe in the glorious unseen world because the living soul makes faith imperative; because Nature reveals it in her highest creation, a living, loving, aspiring, confiding soul; because the testimony of a mother's hungry heart is at least as imperative and as authoritative as the testimony of any prophet, seer, or Christ.

Nay, what if we can carry this holy war into the camp of what seemed the enemy,—and find there our comrades and allies! What if the very thing that threatened our faith should turn out to be the secret of its new life! What if we who have been so largely influenced by modern scientific methods and conclusions can find a way to influence the active world from which those influences came! What if we can find in Science itself a rational basis for belief in that glorious unseen Universe, which mere authority cannot guarantee, and which mere assertion cannot prove!

In every direction, Science, even the Science that seems most materialistic, is leading to the very verge of the Unseen, into which it is ever seeking to pursue the causes that elude its grasp, but the well-spring of whose life it can never find. The dim mighty ocean it has never explored: the surf of its tides alone we know: so that even it confesses, though, it may be, in other words;—"The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal." What, then, if we can make common cause with Science. No Church in Christendom

is more able to do it, because no Church in Christendom stands more clear of survivals of mediæval tradition. What if we can take the torch of Faith, more and more becoming the torch of Knowledge, and flash it across the boundary line where Science is groping,—ay! carry it beyond the grave, beyond the fabled gates of Hell, beyond the fabled gates of Heaven, and so light up the world beyond that it will be known as only an orderly continuation of life here, and be comprehended as the scene of the further unfolding of the great process of evolution, which here has made us men militant, and there may make us men triumphant! and what if Faith and Science eventually put into our hands some conceivable, perhaps some well-nigh demonstrable, basis of rational belief in a universe of life and law and order and beauty beyond the boundaries of the visible, into which, as by a new birth, we shall all emerge, marching forth from the earthly abiding place, when that shall fail us, and passing on to the new experiment of living, as a natural and not as a supernatural change;—passing on, not to a fairy Heaven or a tragic Hell, or to a postponed theatrical judgment day, but to a Universe of spiritual worlds, interpenetrating and enfolding the material worlds, with law everywhere, education everywhere, effort everywhere, change and progress everywhere! What if, concerning this, as our highest calling, we hear the spirit saying unto us—"Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee"! God grant it; that we may also have to say,—"And the spirit entered into me, when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me."

IV.

But we shall be told,—we are continually told—that they who deny the supreme authority of the written word cannot have any ground for believing either in the existence of God or in the immortality of the soul. Let us listen to the spirit concerning that. It will tell us that every written word came from the human soul,—that the highest and most spiritual parts of the Bible itself were called into existence by men in hours of exaltation of faith and hope and aspiration,—that Jesus himself is a witness to the presence of the Father with us all,—that the root of all religions is in the human soul, and that there too is to be found the undying revelation of God, the true witness to its own continued life beyond the incidents of earth and time.

No proof of God and of Immortality apart from the Bible! Why the Bible only becomes comprehensible and influential when the spirit of man answers to its call. We can never believe in God till the heart throbs at the thought of Him: and we can have no faith in Immortality till the hunger of the soul bears witness to it. The Bible our only evidence! Nay, but the Bible itself calls upon us to stand upon our feet, that the spirit may speak to *us*.

We shall be further told that the message of the spirit is not available for us, seeing that, however good our faith may be for time, it is but a broken reed for eternity. "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit says unto the churches:" and what says the spirit,—the "still small voice" that persists, when the wranglings of sectarian partizans all die away? Ever the same penetrating message,—"The pure in heart shall see God:" "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life." What is good, then, for the life that now is, must be good for that which is to come: nay, but what is good for this life must be better for that, seeing that all spiritual goodness and beauty will only culminate where life itself culminates—in that world of great promotions beyond the boundaries of the seen.

We shall be told, again, that for all these signal spiritual experiences and enterprises we lack the necessary motive of fear: and it is not only our critics who say that; we have to confess it ourselves. It was almost the first word that greeted me when I crossed the threshold of this Unitarian Church—more than twenty years ago. It was not a critic but a faithful Unitarian who said to me,—"I am sorry for you; you are so hopeful: but you are doomed to disappointment: we have no devil and no hell," But I thought then, as I think now, that there is that in human nature which may become a more lasting motive than fear of the devil,—a more constraining force than the dread of hell: and to that also we are called by the spirit. Fear is based on that which is without; but the spirit appeals to that which is within. To the deepest things in us it appeals; to the unselfish instincts of the soul; to the love of God, not to fear of the devil; to the joyous up-yielding for uncalculating service, not to the cowardly longing to escape interminable torture; to the spirit's capacities for advancement through obedience, not to enforced surrenders compelled by fear: and these end for us all bargaining with God, and make the life of the loyal soul a natural advance towards the beautiful and the good.

And if, in relation to the life beyond, these things are so, then, for this life also,—for our worship, and fellowship, and work, and teaching on earth—all must, in like manner, be true: and it will be well for us to recall this to-day, as those who are specially interested in our churches.

Until now, the exigencies of our position have led us to live a somewhat controversial and critical life. It has been inevitable. We have had to be a Church militant. But the fighting mood is not a fruitful mood. There must come something else ere we can hear the spirit say, as it was said to those who sang "in the height of Zion,"—"Their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all."

But, in truth, controversy would lose more than half its unprofitableness, even as controversy, if we strove more for the precious kernel of spiritual truth, and thought less of the husk of mere verbal expression,—if we contended for this or that doctrine only because of the living

fruitful thought or nourishing hope embedded in it,—if we argued about God and Jesus as though both lived and loved us now. Alas, how apt we are to blunt or stifle the spirit with the letter! And yet, while we debate about a phrase, or a word too much here or too little there, the mighty tides of human life flow by; and louder and louder every day grows the half-defiant question whether there is so much as a God or any life beyond at all.

Not to silence us, then, but to teach us how to speak with stronger emphasis; not to make us unmindful of the things we have been so long striving for, but only to inspire us with far-reaching ideals, and to carry us to living truths beneath dying modes of expression, does the spirit say,—"Stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee."

Our fathers used to sing, and we, too, might sometimes sing,—

> "In vain we tune our formal songs,
> In vain we strive to rise;
> Hosannas tremble on our tongues,
> And our devotion dies."

But, if the spirit animated us, we should alter all that. We should make an end of the "formal songs," and sing the songs of conquerors. We should let the heart speak. And, even though we could not achieve the demonstrations of which I have been speaking, we should believe where we could not prove. We should make the old walls ring with the songs of the New Jerusalem, coming out of Heaven from God. We should not hesitate to tell of our glorious brother Jesus as living now, still gathering round him disciples and comrades, but now "a great multitude that no man can number,"—still the lover of little children, the consoler of miserable women, the helper of struggling men,—still carrying out in Heaven, and in Hell, wherever that may be, the redeeming work that was the passion of his life on earth,—still with us, and ever to be with us, our brother, our leader, our inspirer and our friend. Then we should have "good tidings of great joy for all people." Then many dark problems would be solved, the crooked things would become straight, and the rough places plain. Then we should know, even in the absence of demonstration, that there is a whole universe beyond our merely critical powers; and, in soaring towards that, we should find the wings of faith, and hope, and love; and dare to prophesy where we cannot demonstrate; and say, as of old, "The hand of the Lord is upon me;" and let that hand lead us, where flesh and sense are of no avail.

Then, perchance, our gatherings from week to week would be re-inforced by deeper loyalties and more thrilling interests. Then, with the living spirit speaking to us, and as men standing on our own feet, we should not sigh for rituals, and lean on liturgies, and so take refuge from our inability to pray for ourselves. Then we who are hearers would ask to be inspired rather than pleased—nay, to be sometimes sent away silenced rather than charmed. Then, while

escaping from the superstition of the special sanctity of times and places, we should be less open to the charge that we "forsake the assembling of ourselves together."

Bear with me, then, if, on that serious subject, before I close, I lay this at the door of the hearts of any of you who are drifting into carelessness and neglect—who are more and more ready to turn away from the humble chapel, from your minister and from your fellow-worshipers,—ay! perhaps, even from your own children, whom you send, but from whom you part. Stand upon your feet, you in whose soul the lamp of faith is dying—you from whose spirit the love of religious comradeship is departing. Stand upon your feet, and let the spirit speak to you.

What we have come together for to-day is what we all need week by week, the helpfulness of sympathy, the joy of communion, the inspiration of fellowship. Men and women, as well as children, are led more by the music of the affections than by the announcements of the reason,—by the ties of comradeship than by the lines of logic,—by the social instincts than by the demonstrations of argument,—by the spirit than by the letter. If we remembered this, and acted up to it, we should no more talk of "duty" when we talked of worshiping together: we should say, "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

Or if we are not careless and negligent, but are only drifting into the delusion that we can go our own way and worship God alone, and in any way we please, still let the spirit speak to us. Long experience has taught us that there comes with united worship an inspiration that does not come to isolation. Very blessed, indeed, is the incoming of the spirit when the lonely heart is stirred with the longings that struck out from the soul of the Hebrew worshiper the cry, "As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks so panteth my soul after thee, O God, my soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?" But it was he who also said,—"When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude. I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday."

Yes!

"Bright Thy presence when it breaketh
Lord, on some rapt soul apart;
Sweet Thy Spirit when it speaketh
Peace unto some lonely heart;
Blest the raptures
From unaided lips that start.

But more bright Thy presence dwelleth
In a waiting, burning throng;
Yet more sweet the rapture swelleth
Of a many-voiced song:
More divinely
Glows each soul glad souls among.

Not alone each angel waiteth ;
Not apart each seraph sings ;
Lo ! the heavenly host dilateth,
Circling bright the King of kings ;
List ! the rapture
From ten thousand voices rings.

With that radiant throng supernal,
Grant me, Lord, to shine for Thee ;
With that harmony eternal,
Blend my song eternally.
Let me love Thee
Dearer still in company."

Now, need I say that in all I have said there has been no desire t depreciate criticism, to fall back on obscurantism, mysticism, emotionalism. I should not have said these things everywhere. Els where, I might have pleaded for severe reasoning and determine pressing home of arguments. But *we* have no lack of these. Eve our opponents will not accuse us of egotism if we say that we hav made full use of our critical and intellectual powers. But what the say is—and what they say is partly true—that we are apt to let th reason repress the soul ; that in our desire to be cultivated and fr from cant we are in danger of becoming formal and devoid enthusiasm, as dignified as a marble statue, but as rigid and as cold that this even tends to chill faith and hope, and that sometimes eve it might be said of us, as the spirit said in this very book ; "Son o man, can these dry bones live ?"

I said that what is laid to our charge is partly true ; yes, but no true in the deep and abiding things ; and yet the extent to which it i true at all measures our need of this very thing of which I have bee speaking,—the spirit to thrill us with his mandate—"Son of ma stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee". God bless ou gatherings to this end !—that the spirit may set us upon our fee and speak to us, that we may hear and live.

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WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

A SERMON

PREACHED AT

THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

Unity Church, Islington, June 4th, 1884.

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WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?

MATTHEW xxii. 42.

"What think ye of Christ? Whose son is he?"

THE question Jesus put in some words like these to his apostles (when the time came in his ministry at which he resolved to take upon him the title of Messiah) is a question which I was forced very plainly to put to myself when I continued to preach after leaving the English Church; and it is a question which is becoming, as it seems to me, of more and more importance for a Christian teacher to have an answer to, not only on his lips, but within his mind and heart. To say the truth, I think that the whole success of a Free Christian Ministry, and the very life in the future of the body to which we belong (so far as it confesses Christ at all), depends on our having such ideas concerning Jesus as will retain and keep around him, living and impelling, the emotions of the past; not, of course, in the same form as that into which the past threw them, but in a form which will be alive with equal, but not similar, emotion.

It is incessantly said of Unitarianism and of Unitarian preaching that it is cold, that its tendency is away rather

than towards a growth of life, that it is unideal and unimpassioned.

And when I asked myself the reason of this accusation (which, though continually repudiated, is continually reasserted), I felt that it partly arose from prejudice,—our opponents assuming that no warmth of feeling could be felt towards Jesus as a man—but also that there was some truth in it, and in this way—that Unitarians, both teachers and hearers, in a natural anxiety not to speak of Jesus in such a manner as to lead people to infer that they gave him the honour and love due to God alone, tended to push him aside by slow or swift degrees from his place in spiritual history, from his dominant personal relation to us, from his claim upon our love and faith, from his spiritual leadership of Mankind; and in so doing lost all, or the greater part of that emotion of love and reverence to him which was indeed the moving force of the career of Christianity; which (handed down to us fraught with the accumulated emotion of centuries) should increase rather than lessen in our hands, and without which our religion is not Christianity at all, but the Theism of the Prophets and the Psalms—a noble religion, indeed, but one wholly inadequate, as it seems to me, for the universal humanity in variety of modern life.

It is to this Theism that so many among us are tending, and it is in the more or less of that tendency that the coldness complained of is found. Theism to David and Isaiah was not cold, but full of high emotion; and we can have the same emotions as they possessed. But they are emotions which do not flow out of, or engage, the passionate interests of all humanity. They do not take in the

interests of modern life, they do not belong to the court and the market, to the life of man with man and of nation with nation, to the ideas which have moved in history and in philosophy, to the hopes and ideals of mankind—in anything like the same manner, either in kind or in degree, as the ideas of Christianity do, or the emotions which belong to those ideas.

Theism is not human in the way in which Christianity is; and it is in that fact that its lesser power to kindle emotion, or to warm its teaching, is to be found. Without the passions which move incessantly, like glittering and intense fire, around the person of Jesus, religious teaching will not make men's hearts to so burn within them as to bring them in crowds to hear and to obey, and to be impelled to become teachers in turn.

I say these things diffidently before this audience, conscious that many will not agree with me; but I have no diffidence concerning the thing itself. Of that I am convinced. Theism is not only inadequate to the religious wants of mankind, it is also an anachronism. To go back to it alone when Christianity has been, is like choosing to be a child when one has become a man. As the child is father of the man, so is Theism the father of Christianity. But one chooses to remain a man; and Jesus was right when he said, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me."

Ever since I left the Church this question has been pressed upon me more and more strongly; and I have asked myself—What was the last and first cause of the success of the preaching of St. Paul? How was it that his gospel seized on so many and diverse national characters, on men

in all ranks of society and of education; and I have come to the conclusion that it was his passionate love of Jesus as his human master, and as his indwelling friend, and his power of making others thrill with the same love and faith which did this evangelizing work.

I have been astonished, as I read with changed eyes the Epistles, to find this love to the man, not this adoration of the God, everywhere. It is the dominant note, and I have often wondered why we could not frankly take the same note and live upon the same platform without fear of being mistaken. If we could feel as he felt towards Jesus, and speak and teach in the same way, no one would accuse us of coldness, nor would the boldest opponent dare to call us merely Theists. And of late, as I have read the Epistles in the Evening Services, I have said to myself, "Why not? Why not speak as St. Paul spoke? Why not feel as he felt towards Jesus?" For it is plain to me, as it is plain to all here, that St. Paul had not one touch of Trinitarianism about him; that there is not a single saying in all his writings which imputes Deity to Jesus, which mingles him up even with God's nature, which disturbs the unity of the worship we give to God alone, which even tends to replace the idea of God by the idea of Jesus. The severance between God the Father and Jesus is complete; and it is so complete that it is with absolute fearlessness of being mistaken that St. Paul speaks of his personal love of Jesus, and of his personal union with him and of his faith in him. Throughout, Jesus is a man to St. Paul, of the same nature as himself, but his Master, his Guide, his Lord in humanity.

Nor, again, is there one word in St. Paul's writings which

would lead us even to infer that he was aware of the miraculous incarnation, or of the miraculous reanimation of the body of Jesus, or of any miracles wrought by him which needed powers which St. Paul did not believe were also possessed by himself and others. In all the phrases of lofty love, faith, devotion which he uses of Jesus, there is not one which a Unitarian, who had, like myself, rejected the miraculous origin of Jesus, and with that his Deity, might not frankly use. And yet there is no doubt that many of us would object to use them, because there would not be behind them the same belief in the immanent and personal presence of Jesus as St. Paul possessed, nor the same intensity of affection, nor the same conviction that through all that Jesus was on earth—not that God was brought nigh to us—but that we were led nearer to God, and day by day draw more nigh.

I do not think we shall get back into our personal religion, or into our personal teaching that attractive victorious element which warms and kindles and allures men, until we add to our Theism that which makes (not the essence of Christianity) *but* its moving force—personal devotion to Jesus as a Man, intense belief that his ideas are the roots of the Salvation of Humanity, faith in his personal life with the race and the individual, and heartfelt application of his life to the wants of the human soul, and the conduct of social life.

There is no fear of love of the Father dying out, or being replaced by the love of Jesus, *if* we do this as St. Paul did it, as Jesus himself wished us to do it. On the contrary, the more we penetrate (freed from the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus, freed from the legendary miracles which support that

doctrine) into the teaching of Jesus himself and of St. Paul about Jesus, the more are we led by Jesus to the Father, and by St. Paul, through Jesus, to the Father—till tenfold more loving, more sacred, more alone in pre-eminent glory, more the only source and goal of all Righteousness and Truth and Mercy, more the solitary fount of forgiveness, and more the everlasting supporter of eternal life, *He* appears whose work Jesus came to do on earth, and into whose hands he commended his parting spirit.

The love of Jesus, then, such as St. Paul had, such as I think it would be well if we all had, in his way—what is its true ground; what its deepest ground? It must be for us a ground which will not interfere with our love to God, and which will increase our love to Man. It must, when it takes us into communion with Jesus, at once lead us along with him, and beyond him, to the Father.

The ground most commonly dwelt upon is that we love him because he is the Revealer of the Father: and, in truth, when we think of all that he told us of the character of God, and of the way in which he lived it out for us among men, we have enough to love him for; and the one chief and beautiful truth he made clear for ever, and more clear than any had dared to make it before—that God always loved us, even when we were his enemies, and that, therefore, he was never to be feared again, never needed propitiation, never needed to be reconciled to us, never was apart from us, save only as a perfect Father is apart from a sinful child; a Father whose punishments are founded on sacred law, not on anger;—whose law has that Love at its root which seeks the perfection of the child; and whose Love welcomes with unspeakable joy the faintest flush of peni-

tence (a truth which, when believed, annihilates superstition)—ought to make him dearer, perhaps, to us than to almost any other body in the Christian Church, because it is —as a protest against the doctrine of the necessity of a vicarious atonement—one of the truths our ancestors in the faith of Unitarianism have proclaimed and clung to through years of misrepresentation and intolerance.

It were shame in us then to forget all we owe to Jesus who thus established in the minds of men the truth of the Fatherhood of God, on a foundation on which all (whether confessing Christ or not) have built on since his time. For he made it impossible for anyone who followed him, and understood his meaning, not to love God; and when we cease to love *him* who did this for us, or let our love for him grow cold, or, through fear of being considered to hold doctrines which we do not hold, refrain from speaking of him as we feel—we are in danger of loving God less than we ought to do. In proportion to our emotion towards Jesus is, I think, our emotion towards the Father.

This is a lesson I have learnt from the Apostolic Epistles. It is a thought which burns inwardly through all the writings of St. Paul. And shall we lose all that emotion and all its power because, in expressing it for ourselves, we may be accused by our opponents, as by our friends, of using words which seem to be consistent with the doctrine of the Divinity of Jesus? I trow not! St. Paul used them, and we hold that St. Paul—it is our contention—was not, any more than the other Apostles, a believer in the Godhead of Jesus.

But I do not think that the chief source of our love for Jesus arises out of what he revealed with regard to the

character of God. Others, though none so much, had disclosed that character before him; many, inspired by his revelation, have revealed, since Christ's time, other parts of the mind of God; for revelation through man has never ceased, nor will cease, till all men be at one with the Father.

The deepest source of our love to Jesus (and I have come to see that this was at the root of St. Paul's most passionate feeling towards his Master) *was what Jesus told us about Man.* And it is this which seems to me to be wholly concealed by the doctrine of the Godhead of Jesus, even by the doctrine that, through the indwelling of the Word, he was different in kind from us.

When I think of him as the son of Joseph and Mary, as in no miraculous way severed from us; and as in no miraculous way, but simply through yielding to the Divine Spirit that moves in all of us, reaching the heights of self-sacrifice and holiness, so that he could challenge his foes to convince him of sin; when I think of him as conquering in his manhood all sin, and triumphing in his faith over all the forces of the world—there is then a rush of love and joy in my heart for him as one of us, as the human Master of the soul, which has in it, mingled with every other high passion, all the emotion of Humanity. And the feeling is utterly distinct from that which I give to God the Father; and the deeper it is the more I am capable of loving God. Loving my brother whom I have seen as perfect man, I can love God, whom I have not seen, ever more and more.

Well, if Jesus be conceived of as man, and if I believe he said and did as wholly man what we find recorded, what did he disclose to us concerning ourselves?

Why, first and foremost, that we were capable of being entirely at one with God. "I and my Father are one." "I, a man, and the Father are one." The phrase, which I do not doubt was said by Jesus, is claimed as proving his Divine nature. I claim it as the statement that he held pure human nature to be by right at one with the Divine nature. "That would surpass audacity," say the maintainers of his deity, "that a man should say that!"

It is just that revealing audacity that Jesus had; and the truth laid down in the words is one of those which, when believed, establishes the eternal religion in the hearts of men. Once grasped, it lifts the whole of humanity into the ideal region of joy, and effort, and hope, and faith, and life. If any one of us can say, as one of us, "I and the Father are one," then we ought all to be able to say it; and the time shall come when we *shall* say it truly. It is the greatest and the most victorious revelation ever given to Man about himself. And from it follows a multitude of other truths about Man, all of which are nestling in the teaching of Jesus, all of which glow through the writings of the Apostles (though they are often limited by the narrow range of their education)—truths which are growing with the growth of the Race, and which are destined to continuous development.

The first is that Man, collective and individual, is indissolubly united to God, and can never be separated from Him, nor ever finally cease to have, and to belong to, the essential righteousness, and life; so that it is equally impossible, that doctrine being true, for any man, woman or child to become the victim of evil for ever, or to pass into the nothingness of absolute death, of continued unconsci-

ousness of life. Were such things so, a part of God would perish.

To believe, I repeat, this good news from Jesus about Man—that Man is at one with God—is for ever to disbelieve in everlasting Hell, and for ever to believe in eternal and continued consciousness of Being, that is, in immortality.

Then, again, when we hear him claim for Himself, and for all his brothers in human nature, union with the Father, and remember how well the phrase (bold as it is) suits with the earliest declaration with regard to Man—that he was made in the image of God—we begin to feel, in a new way, the meaning of the doctrine of the Incarnation.

That doctrine, bound up with the Godhead of Jesus, *may* reveal something about God, if that view of it be true. *But it reveals nothing about Man.*

But if Jesus meant to say, and if the Apostolic writings had the same conception—that God entered into him, and wove his being through the being of His child and Son, and spoke through him, revealing His own character—(a thought which *does* belong to Jesus and to the early Church), why then that God should incarnate Himself in a man is a fact which is not particular to Jesus, but universal to the race; and God has always from the beginning, and is now, living in us all, speaking through us, revealing by our means phases of His manifold Being to our fellow-men —always the Word taking flesh (to use that oriental phrase), in more or less degree, in proportion to the education of the being into whom He enters; and revealing Himself, now in the development of intellectual truth, so

that all science is the self-revelation through incarnation of the intelligence of the Father; now in the development of beauty, so that all art is the revelation through incarnation of the essential Beauty of God; now in spiritual power, so that all human goodness and love and ideal effort to perfection is the revelation through incarnation of the essential Spirit of purity and love—*until* in this incessant Incarnation—in various forms and phases throughout the whole of the human race—we *do* see God in His variety; but as long as we are imperfect, not in His entirety—never, indeed, in that, as long as eternity shall endure. But, nevertheless, when all Humanity is perfect, God will be incarnate in the whole body of it in the most universal way which at present we can conceive.

It is that truth (one of infinite import) which Jesus revealed about Man; and its imaginative and impelling power over the affections and the thought of men is as great, as its practical effect is upon the daily life of the individual, and on the progress of the whole of Humanity. Were it believed, I cannot almost conceive the change it would work upon the world. But it is growing towards belief, and the far-off future will see it as the leading conception of human life and of human history.

Lastly, though I might tell of many more truths revealed by Jesus about Man—whenever we look straight at him as man and do not confuse ourselves with any shreds of the old belief—there is this one truth which belongs to our inner life; the sinlessness that he attained.

It is said that no man can be sinless, that therefore, if Jesus was sinless, he was God; that he claimed sinlessness, and therefore that he was God.

I maintain, on the contrary, that he did not claim to be sinless in any sense *impossible* to us his brethren, that he was born and grew up to manhood with the same nature at all points which we possess, not præternaturally perfect so that he could not do wrong, but tempted as we are and resisting temptation ; that he reached his spiritual perfection as a man may reach it, through struggle against the elements of imperfection, fighting the good fight of faith and love, conquering day by day the evil, and proving in his own person that man is capable of arriving at holiness. It is his revelation, proved in experience, of the capability of men to reach a goodness which has no sin. "*Man can be sinless*"—that is what he told us about ourselves—through faith in God, and love of God. And it is a revelation which we have almost forgotten, and which has been wholly concealed from many of us by the theories of theologians.

It means not only that the forgiveness of sins by God is assured to us—it means much more! It means that being forgiven we can pass on to spiritual perfection, and that we shall do so ; that we may, like Jesus, do so, even in this life ; that we certainly shall arrive at it in the other. What one man did another can, and all shall do ; till all mankind, one and all, reach the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ—attain the perfect Man.

I have therefore no dread of saying that Jesus reached sinlessness, lest I should be thought to say, in that, that he was God. For I believe he reached it *as* one of us, in all points tried, and in all points conquering as a man. And I believe that when he revealed that Man could be sinless, so vast a power was added to the human soul, that in the

conviction of that truth many, even here on earth, have reached, as the last days of life drew near, the state in which they cannot sin—the state we all shall reach hereafter. It was the belief of the writer of the Epistle of St. John —"We cannot sin because we are born of God." It is a belief that underlies all the later epistles of St. Paul—that in all points he could become like Jesus; and it is a belief which wants restoring to the Christian Church, though it exists in many curious forms, wrenched away from the original conception.

I am sinless—Jesus believed—in absolute yielding of my whole Being in faith and love to my Father, and in absolute love of Man. I have conquered, finished all my work: and in myself I reveal this truth of man's sinlessness to my fellow-men. They following my steps may attain my righteousness.

Can a more glorious truth be revealed to us concerning our nature? Can a more impelling, exciting, intense belief possess and drive our inward and outward life? Can there be a truth more full of that divine joy and hope for the human race which in the mouths of prophets and poets inspires them with words and thoughts that paint the golden year; and in the lives of workers sends them forth, like warriors, to beat down evil in the world, and to carry forward the victory of God?

This is then another of the Revelations of Jesus concerning Man. They are all founded on the doctrine of his absolute humanity, and on the necessary denial of his Godhead. They are lost when we believe him to be God.

And now read St. Paul—read the rest of the Epistles with these thoughts, and do you marvel at the wonderful

emotion that fills them towards Jesus? That emotion is the emotion of men towards a Man.

It has none of the qualities of the emotion that men feel towards God in worship. It is intensely human. It is the passionate love of servants to a Master—of soldiers to a Captain, of men living in and by and through the truths of one who has revealed their own powers to themselves, of men who are convinced that their Brother is alive and that he is in daily, impelling communion with them—of men who look to clasping his hand hereafter in holiness, and being brought by him to God the Father.

It is this human and passionate emotion of which we all, in every Church and Sect, want more and more, if we would make our own lives more active, and if we would carry forward Christianity as the conquering power of the spiritual life of the world. We need to love Jesus more, and to live in Him more; to feel for him what St. Paul felt. And the grounds on which this passionate human love of him is founded I have endeavoured to lay before you.

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WHAT IS LEFT

AFTER THE

QUESTIONINGS OF OUR TIME?

A Sermon

PREACHED AT THE ANNUAL MEETING OF THE

BRITISH AND FOREIGN UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION,

Unity Church, Islington, May 27th, 1885.

BY

BROOKE HERFORD.

37, NORFOLK STREET, STRAND,

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WHAT IS LEFT AFTER THE QUESTIONINGS OF OUR TIME?

2 Cor. iii. 11:

"Much more that which remaineth is glorious."

After the battle they call the roll. After the trials of hard times the merchant takes stock to see how he stands. It is well to do this sometimes in the higher realms of mind. I think that in this world of religious ideas and beliefs we have of late years had such a period of conflict and upheaval, and to some extent of misgivings and fears; and I believe a time has come when it is possible—and, if I read things rightly, very encouraging—to pause a moment and ask what is left us, and how we stand, in these greatest subjects of human thought.

I suppose that the present generation has witnessed such an overhauling and investigation of religious faith as the world never saw before. There have been other times of keen and wide-spread scepticism among certain classes of thinkers, but there never was a time when the questioning of Religion was at once so deep and searching, so general, and so entirely fearless and public. The questioning has been, on the whole, singularly earnest and fair, and generally even reverent. Of course, in any age there will be some mere scoffers and destroyers. But for the most part, alike

in the direct questioning of religion, and along the parallel lines of science, there has been an honest endeavour to look at things truly, and to see what there really is in these great subjects.

For a generation this questioning process has been going on, and sometimes it has seemed doubtful whether, by the time it was completed, there would be anything remaining. Now one point in the old beliefs of Christendom has been pronounced untenable, now another. One thing has been declared unscientific, and another unhistorical. First religion as it was systematized in the creeds, then religion as it appeared in the Bible, and at length religion altogether, was questioned, and by many given up. And even among those who still held to religion, and wanted to do, there has often been a doubt they hardly liked to own, whether it was not really being gradually undermined. All this has produced wide-spread anxiety and uncertainty. It has driven some into Catholicism, or into any other Church that seemed by its old consolidated authority to offer some firm standing-ground for the ancient pieties. And much more widely still, it has led to a slackening and hesitation in those pieties. People have doubted about supporting churches which might by-and-by be outgrown; they have become careless about prayers which it was doubtful if there was any Being to hear; they have hesitated to teach their children things which they might have to unlearn; and, altogether, it has sometimes seemed as if the drift of the real thought that dared face the light, was gradually pushing religion aside, either off into the cold altitudes of mere useless speculation, or back into the dens and caves of superstition.

Well, if I read the thought of the time at all rightly, there

has come a distinct lull and pause in all this. Science, criticism, philosophical analysis, have had their freest and keenest way, and have come to something like a halt. I do not mean for a moment, either that their work is proving delusive, or that they have come to the end of it; but certainly there has come a halt in those inferences from their work which seemed to threaten religion. The fact is, it was always in the inferences (from Science, for instance), rather than in any actual discoveries, that the danger seemed to lie—and mostly in the inferences as expounded, not by the really greatest masters of thought, but by their mere camp-followers. But now, those inferences have been discounted. The uttermost they can lead to has been frankly faced, and it is coming to be seen that they leave the highest and deepest realities simply untouched. All the deep mysteries of being, which have through the long ages moved the heart of man to wonder, faith and worship, are just where they were. If our modern Science can throw no new light upon them, at any rate it throws no new darkness; and it leaves us still with the old light, which has never failed or wavered, in the broad instinct and tendency of human growth, and in the clear bright convictions of the wisest and holiest of our race.

So I have thought that it might be a help to us to-day to consider, in something of closer detail, how all this is—just how, here and there, at different prominent points of religious thought, the new researches and reasonings of our time have seemed as if they were threatening the old faiths, but do, after all, leave them, in all their deep essentials, where they were.

To begin with, perhaps the very first thing that has clearly

emerged from the uncertainties of modern questioning, is—*Man* himself. It might seem a small consolation to those who felt as if all religion were slipping away from them, to be told that man remains. But it is not so trifling a remainder, after all. They tell of a poor Frenchman, who, when misfortune had apparently stripped him of everything, was asked: "My poor friend, what is there left to you?" "Myself," was the cheery answer. And, in reality, oneself, just this nature and life of ours, as we stand up amid the mystery of things, is quite as important a remainder for the reconstruction of faith as for the reconstruction of fortune.

You know it did not seem quite clear awhile ago that even man was going to remain. At least it was doubtful if anything was going to be left, except various kinds of fibre and tissue. It was declared as in the line of science, and only a little ahead of actual proof, that man is derived directly from the brutes, and ultimately from the primal fire-mists; and it was inferred that, from his fancied spiritual elevation, he had to be put back into the ranks as a mere being of earth like the rest, with no more real power over what he will do or be than a rose has of choosing whether it will be white or red. Now, I do not think I am exaggerating when I say that all this inference at least is now seen to be entirely baseless. The fact is, that all that Science or Philosophy may discover about man's origin does not affect the reality of what he is. The important thing is, not what humanity has grown from, but what it has grown into. Account for man how you will, you have to account for the whole of him, or at least have to take account of the whole of him. Even if man has to be reduced to the terms of matter, still the only effect is, that the definition of matter has to be

spiritualized, so as to include all that before the world called heart and conscience and soul. For, the first life that you come across that has manifestly in it that quality which we call goodness—that is gentle and thoughtful and kind, that stands up against the wrong, and holds to the right even in the face of loss or pain, and that has a happy thankfulness and a patient trust—why, such a life scatters all doubts about man's higher nature to the winds. The old theological ideas of man's higher nature may have to go; the idea of man's having been created all at once perfect, and having then by his first sin fallen into total depravity and hopeless ruin—that may have to go, I think is largely gone; but man, as he is, remains, with this mingled struggling nature, and among its factors those that we call conscience and soul, and all the striving in which these subtler elements reach onwards. Man remains—not only in these broad tendencies of the race, but in the highest life of the race—man, with his restless battling for the right; man, with his growing principles of kindness and beneficence; man, in his upward-reaching thoughts of trust and worship; man, in the hero, the sage, the saint, the Christ—man at his highest;—and he thus remains, not as an accident or an extreme, but as that to which the race is tending, which the very existence of the race means. And if, indeed, all this has come by slow, orderly development, through the moulding and pressure of the facts of the universe—and therefore corresponding to the facts—then all the more are these great lines of moral and spiritual movement unfailing indications, not only of what is in man, but of what is in the universe around him.

And so it is, that not only Man remains, but *God* remains. Many of the old ideas of God may have had to go—I think

they have—but I do not hesitate to affirm that all that ever was essential and best in the thought of God stands on a firmer foundation to-day than ever before. It is curious to trace how this has come to be, for twenty-five years ago the common mind was possessed by a vague apprehension that the tendencies of scientific discovery were gradually leaving no place for Theism. Already Comte had said that "Science conducts God with honour to its frontiers, thanking Him for His provisional services;" and when Evolution came, multitudes jumped at once to the inference that, supposing it proved, it would supply "an explanation of the universe without God." But no one can look at the attitude of science to-day, or at the special position of the evolution-theory, without seeing that all such inferences were wholly groundless. I speak of this, not as for a moment pretending to criticise the reports of science, but simply noting what they are. And this is what I am struck with: that, however far back or however far in investigation may be pushed, it still leaves us as much as ever in the hold of that haunting mystery of how this marvellous universe has come to what it is, every atom and fibre of it throbbing with meaning and purpose. The solemn process of Creation just as surely obliges us to think of some mysterious Power within it, whether we think of it as concentrated in the mighty fiat of a brief six days, or watch it along the slow evolution of a million ages. Nay, the very terms by which scientific thinkers try to indicate that mysterious power without defining it—such as Clifford's "mind-stuff," or Matthew Arnold's "stream of tendency"—all indicate, not merely a mystery, but a sense of its working in those very ways which have led mankind to call it by some name of Deity. I suppose that,

of all living thinkers, Herbert Spencer has looked into this mystery with most freedom from any desire to explain it in any religious sense, and yet his latest word about it is, that we are ever "in the presence of an infinite and eternal Energy from which all things proceed." That is enough! Not all that religion needs, but all that we need for science to leave us, in order to justify religion. For with this one firm spot to start from, the mind is led inevitably onwards. Spencer himself began by simply calling it "the unknowable," but has now got as far as this "infinite and eternal Energy." Matthew Arnold goes further, and is sure that it is a power that "makes for righteousness." Others, while still unable to say "God," delight in extolling the glory and beneficence of "Nature." And I recently heard of one of the most noted and earnest agnostics of America, who said to a friend that really he believed he must take to using the word "God" again, in order to avoid the necessity for constant explanations as to how much he believed about this unknown energy. And if it be so with those who try to look at the whole matter in the dry light of intellect, may we not feel that for the common heart of man the real thought of God does stand firmer to-day than ever before—yes, firmer, because it has been questioned as never before, and still every line of questioning leads us back towards it—towards the central, essential idea? The formal doctrines men have shaped out about God may have to go. The old doctrine of God as a Trinity is practically almost gone. All definitions of God constructed out of texts may go. But, when everything of that kind is cleared away, it still remains that the ultimate source and sustaining power of things is Infinite Energy, out of which we see ever proceeding, not only

order and beauty, but life and thought and goodness. It is not any logical proof of God in that fulness of the thought to which the holiest souls have attained, but it is a strong assurance at the solid base of things that in "feeling after Him" along the old lines of religious thought, we are not stretching vain hands into infinite emptiness; that if we still only touch the hem of the Unsearchable, that Unsearchable is all that men have ever meant by God—and more.

Again, look at the great thought of *Immortality*. I suppose that there has been more doubt and questioning of Immortality in our time than ever in the world before. And yet may I not say that, to-day, Immortality stands firmer than ever? It stands firmer, because, while it was always affirmed by Religion, it was thought at the beginning of this period that Science showed almost insuperable difficulties in the way; but now the latest word of Science is that there is really no reason against it, and we are left with the full force of the vast testimonies from the religious side of man's nature. This suspensory verdict of Science is the more significant, because it was here especially that a distinctly negative verdict seemed possible. It was always admitted that no science of man's, reaching so little way into the mighty universe, could prove that there is no God. But it seemed as if, with this little frame of man to deal with, it might be possible to track life to its furthest recess, to make out what it is, and definitely ascertain whether it is anything that can survive the body. But what has been found is, that this wonderful thing "Life" is something of which in the last resort Science can simply tell us nothing. It certainly need

not trouble us that Science cannot find out that life is to survive, because it is equally powerless to find out what life is, at all; and yet this is a reality, the very greatest reality in the whole make-up of us. Perhaps the most noteworthy recent word on the subject from the scientific side is that little work of Prof. John Fiske's on "The Destiny of Man," and he distinctly says, that the scientific evidence is even "against the materialist as far as it goes;" and he adds, that the assumption that the life of the soul ends with the life of the body "is perhaps the most colossal instance of baseless assumption that is known to the history of Philosophy." In the same way the difficulties which Evolution seemed at first to be raising against Immortality are disappearing on closer inspection. If man were really evolved from the brutes, it seemed an almost insuperable difficulty—how could the perishing brute-life develop at some point into life no longer perishable? But then this ceases to be any serious perplexity, as it is seen that, if Evolution be true, it must already, somewhere along its ascent from the primal fire-mists, have done a still more wonderful thing—in developing life at all. So that the supposed difficulties from the side of Science are clearing away, and we are left with the full force, not of mere religious *arguments*, but of those religious *tendencies* in our higher nature which have ever caused the belief in Immortality. What a world of suggestion as to the force of those tendencies there is in that word of Dr. Martineau's: "Men do not believe in Immortality because it has ever been proved; but they are for ever trying to prove it because they cannot help believing it"! There is the broad fact. This conviction of some life-to-come has grown up as a part of man's orderly development, has held its place even when

distorted into forms of terror that men would have gladly disbelieved, has been inwoven with all man's loftiest aims and motives, and in the highest and holiest of our race has become a glad triumphant certainty. Against this mighty world-growth what would weigh even the keenest perplexities of a generation? But even these very perplexities are found not to touch the innermost fact of life. And so the faith in Immortality remains. Many of the forms into which men have shaped their thoughts of it will have to pass away. Its lurid Hells, like its pearly gates and golden streets of Heaven, are seen to be but figures. The whole thought of the eternity of punishment is fast becoming incredible. But that this wonderful life which has somehow come to be in man does not perish with the body, is still to live on in that development which, even at its best, is here only begun—that stands more secure in human faith than ever before.

And so it is with the Bible, and with that great Teacher in whom the light of the Bible culminates into the light of the world. *The Bible* remains—and remains, if I read the signs of human thought aright, in an even nobler position of religious value and helpfulness than ever. Awhile ago it seemed doubtful if this would be so. Men had put the Bible on a false pedestal. They had set it up as an infallible oracle—all alike inspired, all the very words of God, every sentence, on whatever subject, a little divine proposition. And the pedestal was being pulled away. Science was disproving the Bible cosmogony; history was discrediting many of its narratives; criticism was showing that hardly a book in it is what used to be thought. So, altogether, it seemed as if it was about to be overthrown from any place

of supreme reverence and helpfulness. And yet is it so to-day? I think the very opposite is the case. The vessel is found to be earthly and human, but it is not the less a heavenly treasure that is in it. Why, already, on this human side, is springing up a new study of the Bible, not less reverent and far more living. Even from those who used to be regarded as undermining it, come testimonies to the impossibility of doing without it. What a significant utterance is that of Prof. Huxley, published awhile ago, but, as I happen to know, expressing exactly what he thinks to-day:

"I have always been strongly in favour of secular education, in the sense of education without theology, but I must confess I have been no less seriously perplexed to know by what practical measures the religious feeling which is the essential basis of conduct was to be kept up, in the present utterly chaotic state of opinion on these matters, without the use of the Bible. The Pagan moralists lack life and colour, and even the noble stoic, Marcus Antoninus, is too high and refined for an ordinary child. Take the Bible as a whole; make the severest deductions which fair criticism can dictate for shortcomings and positive errors; eliminate, as a sensible teacher would do if left to himself, all that it is not desirable for children to occupy themselves with, and there still remains in this old literature a vast residuum of moral beauty and grandeur. And then consider the great historical fact that for three centuries this book has been woven into the life of all that is best and noblest in English history; that it has become the national epic of Britain, and is as familiar to noble and simple from John-o'-Groat's House to Land's End as Dante and Tasso once were to the Italians; that it is written in the noblest and purest English, and abounds in exquisite beauties of mere literary form; and, finally, that it forbids the veriest hind who never left his village to be ignorant of the existence of other countries and other civilizations, and of a great past stretching back to the furthest limits of the oldest nations in the world. By the study of what other book could children

be so much humanized and made to feel that each figure in that vast historical procession fills, like themselves, but a momentary space in the interval between two eternities?"*

This, from one of the chief expounders of that Science which many have thought was to replace the Bible by the surer revelations of Nature. But the fact is—and it is a very important point, which I do not think has been sufficiently noticed—that the real effect of the scientific progress of our time has been to make, not *our* Bible only, but *all* the Scriptures of man's higher life, of more importance now than ever, not less. For, see! men thought that physical science was going to supply the exact truth on moral and religious things as on material things. But they find it cannot. It can tell them about substances and forces, though even before it has got half-way through these it is among realities which elude its grasp, and of which it can take cognizance only by faith. But when we go to it to ask about right, and kindness, and love, and reverence, it is absolutely powerless; it cannot deny that they are, but simply can tell us nothing about them. In the whole interpretation of the higher life, Science cannot help us, and admits that it cannot. And so we are thrown back with a new interest upon the developments of that higher life itself, upon the great faiths and lives which have been its outcome, and upon all the Scriptures in which it has spoken to the world. These old Bibles of many peoples constitute, all together, a manifold irresistible evidence of the reality of Religion—the material of a Science as real, indeed, if not as capable of the same rigid methods, as that of outward nature. But at the same time, while all these ancient Scrip-

* Huxley's Critiques and Addresses, 1873, p. 51.

tures thus become more valuable than ever before, they show just as clearly the unapproachable greatness of the Bible. This also is the more striking because hardly looked for. A generation ago, Oriental scholars had held up so many pearls of beautiful religious thought which they had dug out of other Scriptures, that there was a growing tendency to believe that if those other Scriptures were equally accessible we should find them just as good as the Bible—perhaps, some of them, better. Well, we have them now. We have them in that grand series of translations of "The Sacred Books of the East." But the fact is, that nothing in our time has so placed the reverence for the Bible upon a rock as that great work. Because now we see that those gems of Oriental thought are really exceedingly rare, while the general character of the huge literatures in which they are embedded is dry, pedantic and obscure beyond all telling. Clear above them all, clearer to-day than ever before, stands the old Book of Books, the Scriptures of the world's noblest line of religious life, voicing alike the spirit of man and the Spirit of God with an ever weightier certainty and clearness, and speaking to us in tones accentuated by the heart-beats of the world's best life, and with a solemn authoritativeness which we can never feel in any utterance of to-day. So the Bible stands firmer to-day than ever before. It stands firmer because this diviner element is cleared of much that, when claimed as equally divine, used to make the whole precarious or misleading. And there is still every divine element that ever there was. There is still every word that came out of the lofty Mount of Vision and the inspired communion of holy souls with God; there is still every one of the grand old words of praise, and righteousness, and

strength, and resting in the Lord. Laws that have inwoven themselves with the moral fibre of the world; Psalms that have echoed along the valleys and from the mountain heights of human experience; Prophecies that have thundered through struggling ages like the trumpet-tones of God; Gospels of faithful living and bright glistening hope, that have made a whole new life for man,—all these remain; and as we learn to pass by their setting, often in the crude and obsolete ideas of the world's childhood, these diviner elements stand out clearer and stronger and more divine than ever.

And if it be so with the Bible as a whole, much more is it so with that *Christ* in whom the whole comes to its brightest point. That life of Christ has not been spared by the questioning and investigating passion of our time; and, moreover, apart from any question of the pre-eminence of his life, the whole position of special reverence and discipleship to him, the whole idea of living out our religious life hold of his hand as it were, has been assailed as false to the spirit of progress and the true individualism of religious thought. And yet I believe that in both respects the old Christian discipleship remains, justified, and is going to remain.

Look at the image of Christ as it is re-appearing to-day out of the dust of critical controversy. Every detail of that image has been challenged by the most searching criticism. But what has it taken away? I think it has cut away the ground from the idea that he was God. It has shown plainly how that idea grew up in subsequent ages, as Christianity passed out among the heathenisms to which it was

natural and common to think of any pre-eminent man as really a God come down from heaven. But what else has criticism done? Has it really affected that unique image which lives for ever in the Gospels, except to bring it out more plainly? Some think, indeed, that it has shown these Gospels, too, to be no longer so reliable as used to be supposed, but of quite later date; that they are not records of companions and eye-witnesses, but only collections of traditions perhaps not completed till the second century. I do not think this is at all proved; but even if it be so, does it affect the historic reality of that great Figure which left such a marvellous impress on those around, that even so long it kept its clear place in men's hearts? Fortunately we know exactly in what direction to allow for the influence of tradition. It was busy overlaying the simple human personality with an artificial glory of Deification. But all this, like the rubbish that buried Pompeii, in burying Christ's humanity, really preserved it. Just because tradition was so busy evolving the thought of his Deity, it left the simple memories of his actual life on earth curiously untouched. That simple life, as it stands in the Gospels, we may take. Occasionally his words may have been dislocated; about some of the deeds we may feel doubtful. But the main lineaments of that great life, and its deep character and spirit, remain really all the surer for the criticism. The qualities which have taken hold of the heart of the world—the love which rebukes our selfishness, the purity which shames our sins, the strong words of righteousness which cut through casuistry like a sword, the perfect peace which stays our hearts in sorrow and unrest, the almost awful holiness which not so much believed in eternity and God,

as saw and knew them, and makes us certain of them too—all this remains, and it is true, indeed, that, whatever has been rendered uncertain, "much more that which remaineth is glorious."

And still there is one final question about this: not so much whether Christ remains, as, whether *Discipleship* remains. Granted that holy and wonderful life, is it simply left to us as one of the incidents of history, one of the many factors out of which we still have to work out, each for ourselves, our faith and our life? Or is Christ still left to us in that great permanent relation of the mastership of thought and leadership of life, in which the heart of the Christian ages has looked to him, in which men have loved to sit at his feet, to rest in his revealing certainty of divine things, and to work and pray in his dear name? This is the last question I shall consider, and for the living helpfulness of religion perhaps the nearest and most momentous to us, and I am convinced that the answer is in no real doubt. Still, I cannot speak of it as something simply to be noted as settled; for there are many who uphold religion, who disclaim any such attitude of special Christian discipleship: some who feel all the holy beauty of Christ's life and word who yet earnestly protest against any such constant reference to him. They think it a mere piece of sentiment, if not a mere piece of superstition. Whatever you find of Truth in him, by all means take it, they say, but take it as what you have thought, not resting in any authority of his. I know this seems the natural tone of mental freedom, and it claims to be the scientific method. And yet, even in Science itself, we do really keep to no such rigid individualism, and in the higher

realms of human faculty we do not even attempt it. Even in Science we do not attempt to work out everything for ourselves. A few great teachers are recognized as authorities even by those who most earnestly protest against our speaking of the authority of Christ. True, it is not an absolute authority we ascribe to them, but it is a very real authority. Still more so is it in those finer, subtler realms of human faculty in which absolute verification is impossible, such as art, poetry, music. Let these have come by evolution, if you will; but when the finer developments have come, they sway the world and hold mankind to their higher mark. So there come along a Shakespeare, a Mendelssohn, and we sit at their feet and own them as our masters. We do not choose them, but they choose us; they lay upon us a constraining touch of power, and compel us to follow them. They are revealers to us, revealers each in the realm in which they are so great, and not the less revealers that it is to our own perceptions—kindred to their own—that they appeal. Well, how should it be otherwise in man's religious life? Must it not be that in this highest, subtlest realm of all, while all shall have some perceptions that way, a few loftiest souls along the ages shall be the teachers, revealers, masters, to the rest? Why, so universal is this necessity of life to group around great personal centres, that those who repudiate the idea of sitting at Christ's feet cannot get away from the tendency to sit at some one's feet. Only, the great true Christ put aside, men are at the mercy of a hundred lesser personalities. I have been especially struck with this in America, where, if anywhere in the world, all self-reliant individualism is at its height. Men may fly off from the old Christ-centre, but it is simply to be drawn into new groupings of essen-

tially the same kind of discipleship—sometimes to men of noble thought and real originality, but far oftener to the strongest assailants of the old, and the leaders of a score of petty "isms." These may all preach the strongest individualism, but their work is really done by insensibly taking that very place of mastership which to the greatest of all we are bidden to refuse. And so this clinging of our religious life to Christ, this loving to hold up his words before us, this sense of an authoritativeness and revelation in his thought when we can clearly see it, this feeling of its being good to weave in the symbols of his name and work and suffering into our religious life—all this is not an exception. It is not the refuge of religious weakness; it is God's provision to help us to religious strength. There is profound truth in that parable of the vine and its branches. We have got to abide in him, or we shall never bear much fruit. What has come of these movements that our generation has seen for building up what some thought would be more advanced kinds of religious life, dissociated from the old discipleship, and from the names and words and usages which keep that discipleship in mind? For the most part, a fastidious and isolating scepticism, which grows into a habit, until nothing seems certain, nothing strong, nothing very much worth striving for or working for. There are noble individual exceptions, I know—branches that have cut themselves off from the old vine, and yet seem very living—but it is the old sap that is in them! That keeps them going for awhile. I have watched these movements in our Liberal Churches—watched them for five-and-thirty years now. I have never been afraid of them. I know they have been one inevitable outgrowth of that free thought and honest speech which our

fathers laid upon us as their most sacred charge. I have fought all through my ministry against every tendency to give such movements the cold shoulder or to freeze them out of our fellowship. But, all the same, I am ever more and more convinced that there is no permanent life and help in them. At their best, they are brilliant episodes leading to nothing. They nourish a faith to which the great realities of God are at times so clear, that it spurns the idea of any revelation being needed, but to which in other moods they are all clouded and uncertain. And they are *not* uncertain. This age, with its investigating passion, has probed to the very depths of being, and found their roots still there. Are we to be constantly re-opening every question, and arguing everything over again from the beginning? That is good for a philosophical investigation, but for the use and power of daily living we want something to rest in nearer, more concrete—not something we shall have to seek, but something to seek us, and hold us. It is here for us, in Christ! It is here in these words of power which come sounding through the centuries with a weight of authoritativeness greater than any can explain. It is here in this wonderful life, which, passed into the eternal world, has made that world nearer to man than ever before, and living there for ever has become a gracious presence to the loving heart of faith. Yes; this also remains. Not only the deep, eternal verities of Soul, and God, and Immortality, but this Bible in which they grew into the world's noblest book, and this Christ in whom they were "made flesh," translated into earth's one perfect Life!

And now, dear friends and old fellow-workers of our English churches, what does all this mean in practical life?

It means this: that all these misgivings people have been having of late years as to what was going to become of Christianity, all the doubts as to whether this whole religious side of life was not being analyzed out of existence, are utterly and entirely groundless.

It means that we may take our part in this religious side of life, and join in with the great Christ-ward, God-ward, Heaven-ward striving of humanity, with a new confidence that in so doing we are not building on mental quicksands, or labouring for dreams and visions, but building on the rock, and working out the noblest realities of being.

It means that the old institutions of religious teaching and worshipping are going to stand, and that we may take up their word, their song, their prayer, with no more of that doubt and hesitation which for a generation past has so often enfeebled them.

For the ministration of Religion, it is almost like a new dispensation. I dare say some of you have been among those who have complained of the preaching of late years as uncertain and straggling, for ever talking about Science and Evolution, and groping about among the foundations; and you have longed for a little of the old Gospel for a change. Yes; and yet how could it help being so? I tell you it has been a pretty serious thing to try to be a minister in this past quarter of a century! With every question re-opened all about us; with the very foundations of Religion threatened; with Science inviting men into its brilliant paths as the only way to any certain truth; hardly able to say a prayer, without some one challenging it as an obsolete

formality,—do you wonder if we have often been straggling in our choice of subjects, uncertain and defensive in our tone, and sometimes voicing more of doubt than faith? But if what I have said be true—and it is true—those days are passing. The foundations have been looked to, and they remain. Much dead wood has been cut away; but out of the storm and the testing stands out in stronger reality than ever the grand realities of Religion, with the Gospel of Christ's Life and Word as their divinest expression, the one sure, unchanging rest for the world's weary and unstable life.

And as with our part in this, so with yours! It means that you may go to worship and join in all its varied service; and that you may teach your children to pray, and tell them the story of Christ, and bring them up to read the grand old Bible words with a new certainty that you are not propping up a perishing form, or teaching what will have to be unlearned, but only keeping in the fellowship of the world's best life, and of the things that remain for ever.

To us Unitarians, all this should come with a peculiar encouragement. Because these things which thus remain are the very thoughts and truths for which our fathers originally went apart, and for which we have constantly pleaded as the simple essentials of Christianity. The One, Infinite Father-life, without any confusing subtleties about the inner relations of His being; the dignity of Human Nature, as something not hopelessly lost and ruined, but ever advancing as the ages pass; the solemn unfolding of the Life to Come, as gracious with some hope for all; and Christ, not as a God to be worshipped, but as a great holy Teacher to be loved and followed—these are the very things for which we have stood, and these are the very things that have survived the

grinding of logic, and the questioning of science, and the paring down of criticism, and are coming out to-day with a new clearness as the pure essence of Religion, and the truth that will stand for ever.

So we may go forward in working for them, and spreading them, and building them up in every way we can. We may not see them perfectly—who can? We are but seekers still. But at least we have got clear from the obscuring dogmas which have so long shut out the brightest light of God. We look toward God, toward Christ, and toward the solemn life to come, not setting up any small conditions of what men must believe about them, but simply sure that there is light, and that to the pure in heart and those who keep their faces towards it, the light shall grow more and more. They are

> —— "Great truths that pitch their shining tents
> Outside our walls; and though but dimly seen
> In the grey dawn, they will be manifest
> When the light widens to the perfect day!"

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